

IRISH WRITING

**THE MAGAZINE OF
CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE**



Edited by
DAVID MARCUS
and
TERENCE SMITH

Nos. 4-6

1948



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NUMBER FOUR

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FOREWORD



It is unfortunate, to say the least, that IRISH WRITING still cannot be sold in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. *And Northern Ireland*, since having published regularly the work of Northern Irish writers, the interests of all thirty-two counties are involved. For instance, Mr. Boyd's article on Forrest Reid, published in this issue, must lose much of its effect, as those Irish readers most directly interested in Forrest Reid's work will be unable to see it.

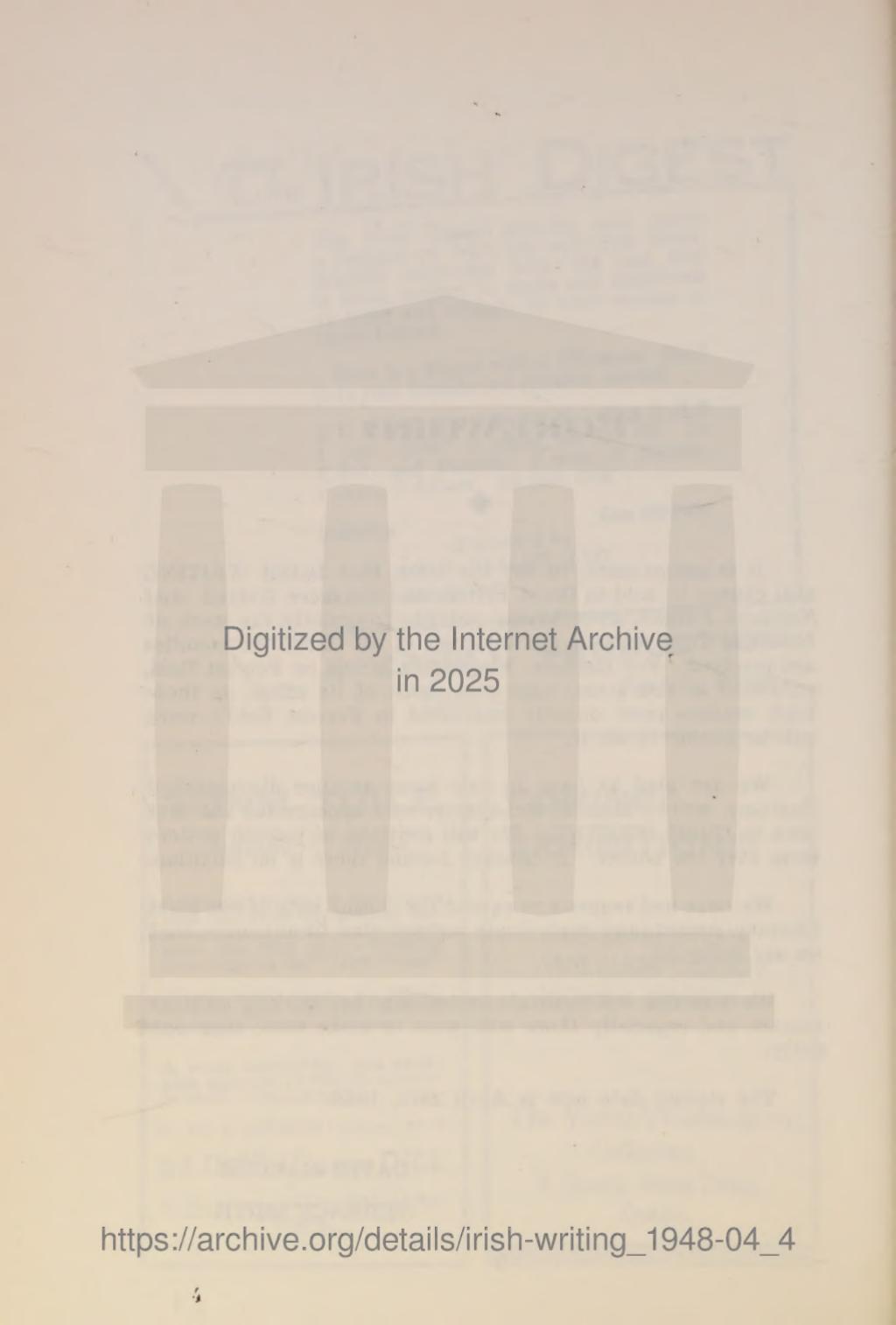
We are glad to have in this issue another distinguished Northern writer, Michael McLaverty, who appears for the first time in IRISH WRITING. We will continue to publish writers from over the border. In literary Ireland there is no partition.

We have had requests to extend the closing date of our First Literary Award, and accordingly we are glad to announce that we are doing so.

We hope this will facilitate writers who are working on their entries, and especially those who wish to make more than one entry.

The closing date now is April 28th, 1948.

DAVID MARCUS
TERENCE SMITH



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FRANK O'CONNOR



The Cornet-Player Who Betrayed Ireland

AT this hour of my life I don't profess to remember what we inhabitants of Blarney Lane were patriotic about; all I remember is that we were very patriotic, that our main principles were something called 'Conciliation and Consent,' and that our great national leader, William O'Brien, once referred to us as 'The Old Guard.' Myself and other kids of the Old Guard used to parade the street with tin cans and toy trumpets, singing 'We'll hang Johnnie Redmond on a sour apple tree.' (John Redmond, I need hardly say, was the leader of the other side.)

Unfortunately, our neighbourhood was bounded to the south by a long, ugly street leading uphill to the cathedral, and the lanes off it were infested with the most wretched specimens of humanity who took the Redmondite side for whatever could be got from it in the way of drink. My personal view at the time was that the Redmondite faction was maintained by a conspiracy of publicans and brewers. It always saddened me, coming through this street on my way from school, and seeing the poor misguided children, barefoot and in rags, parading with tin cans and toy trumpets and singing 'We'll hang William O'Brien on a sour apple tree.' It left me with very little hope for Ireland.

Of course, my father was a strong supporter of 'Conciliation and Consent.' The parish priest who had come to solicit his vote for Redmond had told him he would go straight to Hell, but my father had replied quite respectfully that if Mr. O'Brien was an agent of the devil, as Father Murphy said, he would go gladly.

I admired my father as a rock of principle. As well as being a house-painter (a regrettable trade which left him for six months 'under the ivy', as we called it), he was a musician. He had been a bandsman in the British Army, played the cornet extremely well, and had been a member of the Irishtown Brass and Reed Band from its foundation. At home we had two big pictures of the band after each of its most famous contests, in Belfast and Dublin. It was after the Dublin contest when

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Irishtown emerged as the premier brass band that it added an unrecorded episode to operatic history. In those days the best band in the city was always invited to perform in the Soldiers' Chorus scene in Gounod's 'Faust.' Of course, they were encored to the echo, and then, ignoring conductor and everything else, they burst into a selection from Moore's Irish Melodies. I am glad my father didn't live to see the day of pipers' bands. Even fife and drum bands he looked on as primitive.

As he had great hopes of turning me into a musician too he frequently brought me with him to practices and promenades. Irishtown was a very poor quarter of the city, a channel of mean houses between breweries and builders' yards, with the terraced hillsides high above it on either side, and nothing but the white Restoration spire of Shandon breaking the skyline. You came to a little footbridge over the narrow stream; on one side of it was a red-brick chapel, and when we arrived there were usually one of the bandsmen sitting on the bridge, spitting back over their shoulders into the stream. The band-room was over an undertaker's shop at the other side of the street. It was a long, dark, barn-like erection overlooking the bridge and decorated with group photos of the band. At this hour of a Sunday morning it was always full of groans, squeaks and bumps.

Then at last came the moment I loved so much. Out in the sunlight, with the bridge filled with staring pedestrians, the band formed up. Dickie Ryan, the bandmaster's son, and myself took our places at either side of the big drummer, Joe Shinkwin. Joe peered over his big drum to right and left to see if all were in place and ready; he raised his right arm and gave the drum three solemn flakes; then, after the third thump the whole narrow channel of the street filled with a roaring torrent of drums and brass, the mere physical impact of which hit me in the belly. Screaming girls in shawls tore along the pavements calling out to the bandsmen, but nothing shook the soldierly solemnity of the men with their eyes almost crossed on the music before them. I've heard Toscanini conduct Beethoven, but compared with Irishtown playing 'Marching Through Georgia' on a Sunday morning it was only like Mozart in a girls' school. The mean little houses, quivering with the shock, gave it back to us; the terraced hillsides that shut out the sky gave it back to us; the interested faces of passers-by in their Sunday clothes from the pavements were like mirrors reflecting the glory of the music. When the band stopped and again you could hear the gapped sound of feet, and people running and chattering, it was like a parachute jump into commonplace.

Sometimes we boarded the paddle-steamer and set up our music stands in some little field by the sea, which all day echoed to Moore's Melodies, Rossini and Gilbert and Sullivan; sometimes we took a train into the country to play at some sports meeting. Whatever it was, I loved it, though I never got a dinner; I was fed on lemonade, biscuits and sweets, and, as my father spent most of the intervals in the pub, I was sometimes half mad with boredom.

One summer day we were playing at a fête in the grounds of Blarney Castle, and, as usual, the band departed to the pub and Dickie Ryan and myself were left behind, ostensibly to take care of the instruments. A certain hanger-on of the band, one John P., who to my knowledge was never called anything else, was lying on the grass, chewing a straw and shading his eyes from the light with the back of his hand. Dickie and I took a side drum each and began to march about with them. All at once Dickie began to sing to his own accompaniment 'We'll hang William O'Brien on a sour apple tree.' I was so astonished that I stopped drumming and listened to him. For a moment or two I thought he must be mocking the poor uneducated children of the lanes round Shandon Street. Then I suddenly realised that he meant it. Without hesitation I began to rattle my side-drum even louder and shouted 'We'll hang Johnnie Redmond on a sour apple tree.' John P. at once started up and gave me an angry glare. "Stop that now, little boy!" he said threateningly. It was quite plain that he meant me, not Dickie Ryan.

I was completely flabbergasted. It was bad enough hearing the bandmaster's son singing a traitorous song, but then to be told to shut up by a fellow who wasn't even a bandsman; merely a hanger-on who looked after the music stands and carried the big drum in return for free drinks! I realised that I was among enemies. I quietly put aside the drum and went to find my father. I knew that he could have no idea what was going on behind his back in the band.

I found him at the back of the pub, sitting on a barrel and holding forth to a couple of young bandsmen.

'Now, "Brian Boru's March"' he was saying with one finger raised, 'that's a beautiful march. I heard the Irish Guards do that on Salisbury Plain, and they had the English fellows' eyes popping out. "Paddy," one of them says to me (they all call you Paddy) "wot's the name of the shouting march?" But somehow we don't get the same fire into it at all. Now, listen, and I'll show you how that should go!'

'Dadda,' I said in a whisper, pulling him by the sleeve, 'do you know what Dickie Ryan was singing?'

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'Hold on a minute now,' he said, beaming at me affectionately. 'I just want to illustrate a little point.'

'But, dadda,' I went on determinedly, 'he was singing "We'll hang William O'Brien from a sour apple tree."

'Hah, hah, hah,' laughed my father, and it struck me that he hadn't fully appreciated the implications of what I had said.

'Frank,' he added, 'get a bottle of lemonade for the little fellow.'

'But dadda,' I said despairingly, 'when I sang "We'll hang Johnnie Redmond," John P. told me to shut up.'

'Now, now,' said my father with sudden testiness, 'that's not a nice song to be singing.'

This was a stunning blow. The anthem of 'Conciliation and Consent'—not a nice song to be singing!

'But, dadda,' I wailed, 'aren't we *for* William O'Brien?'

'Yes, yes, yes,' he replied, as if I were goading him, 'but everyone to his own opinion. Now drink your lemonade and run out and play like a good boy.'

I drank my lemonade all right, but I went out not to play but to brood. There was but one fit place for that. I went to the shell of the castle; climbed the stair to the tower and leaning over the battlements watching the landscape like bunting all round me I thought of the heroes who had stood here, defying the might of England. Everyone to his own opinion! What would they have thought of a statement like that? It was the first time that I realised the awful strain of weakness and the lack of strong principle in my father, and understood that the old bandroom by the bridge was in the heart of enemy country and that all round me were enemies of Ireland like Dickie Ryan and John P.

It wasn't until months after that I realised how many these were. It was Sunday morning, but when we reached the bandroom there was no one on the bridge. Upstairs the room was almost full. A big man wearing a bowler hat and a flower in his buttonhole was standing before the fireplace. He had a red face with weak, redrimmed eyes and a dark moustache. My father, who seemed as surprised as I was, slipped quietly into a seat behind the door and lifted me on to his knee.

'Well, boys,' the big man said in a deep husky voice, 'I suppose ye have a good notion what I'm here for. Ye know that next Saturday night Mr. Redmond is arriving in the city, and I have the honour of being Chairman of the Reception Committee.'

'Well, Alderman Doyle,' said the bandmaster doubtfully, 'you know the way we feel about Mr. Redmond, most of us anyway.'

'I do, Tim, I do,' said the Alderman evenly as it gradually dawned on me that the man I was listening to was the Arch-Traitor, locally known as Scabby Doyle, the builder whose vile orations my father always read aloud to my mother with chagrined comments on Doyle's past history. 'But feeling isn't enough, Tim. Fair Lane Band will be there, of course. Watergrasshill will be there. The Butter Exchange will be there. What will the backers of this band, the gentlemen who helped it through so many difficult days, say if we don't put in an appearance?'

'Well, you see, Alderman,' said Ryan nervously, 'we have our own little difficulties.'

'I know that, Tim,' said Doyle. 'We all have our difficulties in troubled times like these, but we have to face them like men in the interests of the country. What difficulties have you?'

'Well, that's hard to describe, Alderman,' said the bandmaster.

'No, Tim,' said my father quietly, rising and putting me down from his knee, "'tis easy enough to describe. I'm the difficulty, and I know it.'

'Now, Mick,' protested the bandmaster, 'there's nothing personal about it. We're all old friends in this band.'

'We are, Tim,' agreed my father. 'And before ever it was heard of, you and me gave this bandroom its first coat of paint. But every man is entitled to his principles, and I don't want to stand in your light.'

'You see how it is, Mr. Doyle,' said the bandmaster appealingly. 'We had others in the band that were of Mick Twomey's persuasion, but they left us to join O'Brienite bands. Mick didn't, nor we didn't want him to leave us.'

'Nor don't,' said a mournful voice, and I turned and saw a tall gaunt, spectacled young man sitting on the window sill.

'I had three men,' said my father earnestly, holding up three fingers in illustration of the fact, 'three men up at the house on different occasions to get me to join other bands. I'm not boasting. Tim Ryan knows who they were.'

'I do, I do,' said the bandmaster.

'And I wouldn't,' said my father passionately. 'I'm not boasting, but you can't deny it: there isn't another band in

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Ireland to touch ours.'

'Nor a cornet-player in Ireland to touch Mick Twomey, chimed in the gaunt young man, rising to his feet. 'And I'm not saying that to coddle or cock him up.'

'You're not, you're not,' said the bandmaster. 'No one can deny he's a musician.'

'And listen here to me, boys,' said the gaunt young man, with a wild wave of his arm, 'don't leave us be led astray by anyone. What were we before we had the old band? Nobody. We were no better than the poor devils that sit on that bridge outside all day, spitting into the river. Whatever we do, leave us be all agreed. What backers had we when we started, only what we could collect ourselves outside the chapel gates on Sunday, and hard enough to get permission for that itself? I'm as good a party man as anyone here, but what I say is, music is above politics . . . Alderman Doyle,' he begged, 'tell Mr. Redmond whatever he'll do not to break up our little band on us.'

'Jim Ralegh,' said the Alderman, with his red-rimmed eyes growing moist, 'I'd sooner put my hand in the fire than injure this band. I know what ye are, a band of brothers . . . Mick,' he boomed at my father, 'will you desert it in its hour of trial?'

'Ah,' said my father testily, 'is it the way you want me to play against William O'Brien?'

'Play against William O'Brien,' echoed the Alderman. 'No one is asking you to play *against* anyone. As Jim Ralegh here says, music is above politics. What we're asking you to do is to play *for* something; for the band, for the sake of unity. You know what'll happen if the backers withdraw? Can't you pocket your pride and make this sacrifice in the interests of the band?'

My father stood for a few moments, hesitating. I prayed that for once he might see the true light; that he might show this group of misguided men the faith that was in him. Instead he nodded curtly, said 'Very well, I'll play,' and sat down again. The rascally Alderman said a few humbugging words in his praise which didn't take me in. I don't think they even took my father in, for all the way home he never addressed a word to me. I saw then that his conscience was at him. He knew that by supporting the band in the unprincipled step it was taking he was showing himself a traitor to Ireland and our great leader, William O'Brien.

FRANK O'CONNOR

Afterwards, whenever Irishtown played at Redmondite demonstrations, my father accompanied them, but the moment the speeches began he retreated to the edge of the crowd, rather like a pious Catholic compelled to attend a heretical religious service, and stood against the wall with his hands in his pockets, passing slighting and witty comments on the speakers to any O'Brienites he might meet. But he had lost all dignity in my eyes. Even his gibes at Scabby Doyle seemed to me false, and I longed to say to him, 'If that's what you believe, why don't you show it?' Even the seaside lost its attraction when at any moment the beautiful daughter of a decent O'Brienite family might point to me and say: 'There is the son of the cornet-player who betrayed Ireland.'

Then one Sunday we went to play at some idolatrous function in a seaside town called Bantry. While the meeting was on my father and the rest of the band retired to the pub and I with them. Even by my presence in the Square I wasn't prepared to countenance the proceedings. I was looking idly out the window when I suddenly heard a roar of cheering and people began to scatter in all directions. I was mystified until someone outside started to shout, 'Come on, boys! The O'Brienites are trying to break up the meeting.' The bandsmen rushed for the door, I would have done the same but my father looked hastily over his shoulder and warned me to stay where I was. He was talking to a young clarinet-player of serious appearance.

'Now,' he went on, raising his voice to drown the uproar outside, 'Teddy the Lamb was the finest clarinet-player in the whole British Army.'

There was a fresh storm of cheering, and wild with excitement I saw the patriots begin to drive a deep wedge of whirling sticks through the heart of the enemy, cutting them into two fighting camps.

'Excuse me, Mick,' said the clarinet-player, going white, 'I'll go and see what's up.'

'Now, whatever is up,' my father said appealingly, 'you can't do anything about it.'

'I'm not going to have it said I stopped behind while my friends were fighting for their lives,' said the young fellow hotly.

'There's no one fighting for their lives at all,' said my father irascibly, grabbing him by the arm. 'You have something else to think about. Man alive, you're a musician, not a bloody infantryman.'

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'I'd sooner be that than a bloody turncoat, anyway,' said the young fellow, dragging himself off and making for the door.

'Thanks, Phil,' my father called after him in the voice of a man who has to speak before he has collected his wits. 'I well deserved that from you. I well deserved that from all of ye.' He took out his pipe and put it back into his pocket again. Then he joined me at the window and for a few moments he looked unseeingly at the milling crowd outside. 'Come on,' he said shortly.

Though the couples were wrestling in the very gutters no one accosted us on our way up the street; otherwise I feel murder might have been committed. We went to the house of some cousins and had tea, and when we reached the railway station my father led me to a compartment near the engine; not the carriage reserved for the band. Though we had ten minutes to wait it wasn't until just before the whistle went that Tim Ryan, the bandmaster, spotted us through the window.

'Mick!' he shouted in astonishment. 'Where the hell were you? I had men out all over the town looking for you? Is it anything wrong?'

'Nothing, Tim,' replied my father, leaning out of the window to him. 'I wanted to be alone, that's all.'

'But we'll see you at the other end?' bawled Tim as the train began to move.

'I don't know will you,' replied my father grimly. 'I think ye saw too much of me.'

When the band formed up outside the station we stood on the pavement and watched them. He had a tight hold of my hand. First Tim Ryan and then Jim Ralegh came rushing over to him. With an intensity of hatred I watched those enemies of Ireland again bait their traps for my father, but now I knew they would bait them in vain.

'No, no, Tim,' said my father, shaking his head, 'I went too far before for the sake of the band, and I paid dear for it. None of my family was ever called a turncoat before to-day, Tim.'

'Ah, is it a young fool like that?' bawled Jim Ralegh with tears in his wild eyes. 'What need a man like you care about him?'

'A man have his pride, Jim,' said my father gloomily.

'He have,' cried Ralegh despairingly, 'and a fat lot any of us has to be proud of. The band was all we ever had, and

FRANK O'CONNOR

if that goes the whole thing goes. For the love of the Almighty God, Mick Twomey, come back with us to the bandroom anyway.'

'No, no, no,' shouted my father angrily. 'I tell you after to-day I'm finished with music.'

'Music is finished with us you mean,' bawled Jim. 'The curse of God on the day we ever heard of Redmond or O'Brien! We were happy men before it . . . All right, lads,' he cried, turning away with a wild and whirling motion of his arm. 'Mick Twomey is done with us. Ye can go on without him.'

And again I heard the three solmen thumps on the big drum, and again the street was flooded with a roaring torrent of music, and though it no longer played for me, my heart rose to it and the tears came from my eyes. Still holding my hand, my father followed on the pavement. They were playing 'Brian Boru's March,' his old favourite. We followed them through the ill-lit town and as they turned down the side street to the bridge, my father stood on the kerb and looked after them as though he wished to impress every detail on his memory. It was only when the music stopped and the silence returned to the narrow channel of the street that we resumed our lonely way homeward.



SEÁN JENNETT



Persecution

FROM the thing leering in the ditch he fled across the dismal acres of the moor. In the dark waste of his mind he saw it still, half sunk in the frothy brown water, staring at him with derision and hate, with contempt and surprise, with pity even; in its popping eyes every motion and every attitude that through the years, through centuries, had bred fear in his heart. And now it was dead in the dank ditch. But it would not stay there, O why would it not stay there, for it was dead and should not stir; but as he stumbled over the endless heather and the treacherous bent-grass it followed after, swifter and more sure of foot, stretching out wet hands, derisive and unforgiving. Where could he be safe, O God, where was relief and comfort! He had been so long and earnest in seeking, even when this thing did not torment him, and he had found nothing. Now he must soon find haven, soon, soon, before it could come upon him.

The moor rose slowly, without intermission, until in a dull crest it met the blank sky. It was not far away, that tall horizon, but it was hard going in the heather and the grass and he was weary with his day's journey and the pitiless pursuit of the thing. He must reach it soon, for there the sky met the land and he might break through. Beyond? Beyond, surely, hidden by that smooth and opaque curtain, there was sunshine and joy and a rich country where terror never came, and a city in which people did not look with contempt or fear or hate or derision or pity, but straightly, as if you were as other men. There this thing from the ditch could not come at him, its hands could not reach, it could not break through that march, that cloudy wall. It must stay alone on the lonely moor; and he would never come that way again.

The crest! At last he was nearly there. It seemed that it stood before him, eternal and strong and still, and only the length of an arm away, as he lifted dead and leaden feet, one after the other, cumbrously. The thing, the foul thing from the ditch, with its bulging eyes and foamy wrists and wet hands, swiftly coming, was nearly upon him. Weeping, shouting, he staggered towards the ridge, to the place where the sky met the land and he could break through into the sun-

SEÁN JENNITT

light. A pace behind, it stretched out its hands to hold him, brown water dripping from cold fingers, lace of foam shining, held in golden hair, its gaze baleful upon him, intent and fixed, a dagger at his heart. With all his strength he leapt to escape that grasp and flung himself down among the heather on the crest. He was through, he was through!

He lay panting, face down, not daring yet to look up at the paradise into which he had won his way through terror and fear and against all the great weight of the world. He was free now. The thing no longer followed, he no longer felt its eyes upon him. The face of the thing and its hands and foamy wrists no longer hung suspended in his mind, an acid eating at his life. Derision and hate and contempt and pity were left behind too, and soon he would go down into the valley among a new people who would be kind and glad.

At last he looked up, arched his back to look beyond the tall church spires and broad chapel lintels, and above them the huge masses of mills, with their stacks reaching into the sky, tall tubes plumed with smoke. There was no light of the sun. The blank and pallid sky hung unbroken from this side of the city to the other, where the hills rose again, but higher, thrusting blunt heads through the low clouds and gathering them about their shoulders, an errant scarf. He stood looking in dumb surprise down into the valley that was his paradise and his heaven, the end of his agony and fear. No sun, no light of the blessed orb of day, no quiring and friendly voices singing to welcome him, no glad music. None of these things. It was different; it was silent and dark and forbidding. And yet he was happy. Yes, for he was free. The thing in the ditch was gone and no more pursued him and fear had drained out of the day. With confidence he turned and looked back over the way he had come. The moor undulated, dark and deserted, far away into the distance, lonely beyond all thinking, and sinister and terrible, until the sky came down on it where the land rose in the bulk of a huge hill. There in those dark slopes, in the ghylls and cloughs, was fear, fear that had struck through to his bones and that had paralysed him and had weighed down his feet, fear of the unknown and the desert; and more than that, fear of the thing, the enemy that menaced him alone, the face and the wet hands and the foamy wrists, and the swift following of silent feet, the hate that sought to strike suddenly and mercilessly in the back. The moor was empty now, there was nothing there, nothing but the heather and the bent-grass and the aching, pendulous sky. His fear was gone, and already he began to forget.

IRISH WRITING

He walked down towards the city, jaunty and happy, striding out now as though no longer weary, his arms swinging. He came upon a track, a narrow river of silver sand sinuous among the forests of the heather, and followed it until, with the first field of the valley, it became a lane flanked by naked, scrubby thorns and here and there a crab bursting, a flush of blood on the bare black bones, into blossom. They shone in his heart, a fire of love, a gentle rosy radiance. Heaven, after all, might be filled with flowers in due season; he thought so now and continued on his way careless and content.

In front of him he saw a house, from the window of which a warm yellow light shone out into the day, a drift of smoke lolling from the single chimney. It stood endwise on the lane, facing down towards the city, its back turned to the moor, the first house and the last, as though it had been thrust out from among its fellows. He looked at it with gladness and saw that there was movement behind the lighted window, and hastened down. He would ask there what way he should go and what he should do, a stranger in this place, for they could surely tell him; and the woman of the house would give him food, perhaps, and clean clothes instead of those he wore, that were ragged and stained with peat, so that he might be fit to continue and to be seen in the streets of the city.

He came to a gate in a rickety trellis, leading to a path of cracked flags, and followed the path to a door under a porch drowned in the dead or decaying tendrils of climbing plants. He thrust aside the meandering shoots and knocked with bent knuckles on the painted grain of the wood, and waited, looking down at the city between the withered leaves and the dry stalks. Within there was the sound of rattling crockery and the splash of a tap and the sharp clack of a woman's shoe. But no-one came to the door, and shortly he knocked again. Now the sounds of tap and china ceased, and he heard the feet stir aimlessly for a moment and then move towards the door. Carefully he prepared his phrases, moving his tongue about polite words and suppressing the glad songs that a voice within him was shouting. He heard bolts drawn and a key turned and moistened his lips for speech.

Before him in the doorway stood a woman, looking at him and waiting for him to begin. His fine phrases turned to dust on his tongue, and he stood like a mute child while her eyes moved over the length of him and contempt came into her eyes, contempt and derision. He stared at her from a cavern of agony and a bitter sea filled up his heart and swung it to its tides. Voiceless he stared in terror at her face, and from her

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eyes his eyes fell away, past her throat and the breast of her working blouse, complacent garment, and the rolled sleeves at the elbows. She spoke to him sharply, but he did not hear, for he was staring in mounting fear at her arms and hands. Across her wrists a lace of froth made bracelets bright with coloured light, frail jewels, and from her fingers water dripped, from the hand holding open the door and from the hand that lifted her coarse apron. He brought his eyes again to her face and saw her lips move in an impatient phrase, but he did not hear. A ragged, wrenching blade tore through the substance of his brain and he shrieked and lifted his hands towards her. A great light spun before him, slowly, slowly, then fast, and faster, faster, faster . . . Eyes swung at its centre, bulging eyes paired invisibly together, swung and closed and opened and swung.

The spinning light ran faster and faster, beyond endurance, O God, beyond my strength. I cannot hold it, I cannot hold it! My fingers are breaking. The flame of its fire burned in his brain as it spun to a climax, running wild. O God I cannot hold, I cannot hold, hold, hold. . . O God help me to hold.

Slowly, slowly, slowly it turned more slowly, with relief he saw it turn more slowly, slowly, until at last it idled and swung and was still. He heaved a great sigh of exhaustion and thankfulness. And then the light was extinguished and dispersed in darkness, which too was dispersed, and the grey light of day returned.

Between his hands the woman's swollen face stared up at him with bulging eyes and protruding tongue, her wet hands and foamy arms limp and dangling. He let fall her body and fled from the place, fled back towards the moor, and her eyes stared after him, her hands pursued him, wet hands laced with foam, reaching in his brain to twist the last fragile ligament of his life.



PEARSE HUTCHINSON



The Peacock Speaks

Because a knowledge of my own magnificence
forbids my walking, makes me promenade,
and fans my tail, whose plenitude of eyes
are blind (all staring inward in an endless trance
of narcissic self-esteem):

Therefore, Man--ges, even of the early time,
have used my name—which, I must frankly grant,
is in their various tongues, crisp and crystalline—
as aptest emblem for their own root-and-supreme
vice: vanity, vanity.

This naif impudence: which places what, in me,
my so-called humbler status makes a mere
helpless peccadillo, as equal guilt
with human crime, which extra privileges endow
with twice the initial shame—

I say this callow insult will not win a spume
and fume of angry pavonine protest;
for here, in Phoenix Park, on jewel-grass,
I strut, a pampered, pretty dandiprat, a prime
pet—the human mind is queer.

Crampt in his cage, roaring, ranting in vain, the poor
Lion paces; the docile Elephant
performs his trick of bun-from-trunk-to-maw;
the Seal keens out his plaintive wail of pain and tear,
in a small pool, while I!—

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I parade in grandeur, for pale-plumed folk to see.

You, spectacled, serious man, whose tongue
must hold more clichés than a rose-tree thorns:
squeak the old snobbery; but recognize—or try—
the look in your offspring's eyes.

Children can see, can love, can marvel at, can praise
with shrill crow and handclap the splendor of
my tail outspread, flouting the ground; for they
do not need yet a complex thought, a grey disguise
for gladness glowing thru the eyes.

BRYAN MACMAHON



The Sound of The Bell

SUNDAY Mass was over and the priest was removing his vestments when there was a rap on the heavy sacristy door. Maurice Fitz, the old parish clerk, opened it. Outside he saw a cluster of men, mostly middle-aged and old. All were well wrapped up against the December weather. The clerk's eyes narrowed. "Oh, the little dabchicks," he said; "the little dabchicks from Boherbeg."

"We want to see the Parish Priest," said one of the men, a tall hook-nosed fellow, wearing riding-britics and leggings.

"If you do, Mister Gravel Pit, you'll have to wait till he's finished his thanksgiving."

"We'll wait."

The Clerk closed the door slowly, narrowly eyeing the men as he did so. He was dressed in greeny-black and jutting into the nape of his stiff collar were the icicles of his poor grey hair. When he was left with but a small aperture through which to peer, he said: "Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree, boots and breeding brought them here." His astonishingly sensible face redeemed the eccentricity of this statement.

The ten or eleven men waited under the damp inhospitable stone of the church. Every man, except the man with the riding-britics, had his right shoulder higher than his left. This was from constant use of spade and slawn. One man stood a little to the rear. He was dumpy and his face was dyed purple by the cold. A drop of water at the end of his long nose made him look extremely disconsolate. His attitude indicated a vague desire to be disassociated from the others. The man with the riding-britics thrust his hands deep into his fob pockets and looked around to stiffen the loyalty of the others. The man with the purple face looked at him and said, timidly. "Maybe 'twould be better to call to see him in the house to-morrow, Richie."

"We'll see him here and now," said the other stoutly.

Just then the door walked open—seemingly of its own volition—and the men trooped in.

Father Fennell was drying his hands on a linen towel. He was less a tiny man than a large man shrunken. He seemed frail and defenceless. He had a habit of blinking. As he

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dried his hands he looked down at the big boots moving in pairs across the polished parquetry. Now the men had formed a solid ring around him. The clerk slammed the door with unnecessary loudness and scampered around the periphery of the ring until he was near the priest. He took a brass candle-stick from a table. His movements implied a distrust of the men's honesty.

"Good day, men," said the priest. He was still drying his hands.

"Good day, Father Fennell," chorused the men.

The man with the purple face was now in front. "Hard weather for this time of year, Father . . ."

"Ah, is that you, Johnny Mahoon? Well? Any word from Jim?"

Johnny Mahoon inflated. "Next time he'll come home he'll have the collar, Father."

"With the help of God, Johnny!" said the priest with the shadow of a rebuke in his tone.

"With the help of God, Father," said Johnny with meekness and pride.

There was a lull. The clerk opened a wardrobe door and discommoded some of the deputation. He thrust his head in among the bright vestments and began to sing: "Who'll hang the ringer on the black cat's neck? Who'll hang the ringer on the black cat's neck?"

The heavy boots stirred uneasily on the parquetry.

The priest balled up the towel and dropped it on a small table. "Well, men, what brought ye?" he asked.

The men looked at Richie MacNamara of the Gravel Pit. Out of his fob pockets his hands seemed unsure and nervous. Nevertheless, he began: "We came, Father, about the bell."

"The bell?"

"Aye, the new bell."

"Well, what about it? It's a fine bell. A little high-pitched in tone, perhaps, but just the same everybody says 'tis a grand bell."

A deep voice came from among the men: "Aye, it's a fine bell for them that are living in the shadow of the steeple."

"Wax!" said the parish clerk.

"I don't quite follow ye, men," said Father Fennell.

Richie MacNamara had become brave. "You put a shilling a cow on us to pay for that bell. At Donovan's station—you remember, Father?"

"Aye, I remember. And ye paid it like good Christian men."

"Wax!" said the parish clerk.

IRISH WRITING

"Father," enquired Richie righteously, "did any man from Boherbeg ever default in his station-money?"

"Not in my time."

"No, Father. Nor in Father Gibson's time. Nor in Father Prendiville's time. Nor in Father Danny O'Shea's time. Nor in the time of any Parish Priest that came before you. And another thing, Father . . ."

"Well?"

"Did we ever deny you your lawful Christmas dues?"

"Ye did not."

"And did we ever leave you short of the winter's firing?"

"Never! That goes without saying."

"And we paid our part for the new bell, didn't we?"

"Ye did. Ye did. Ye did."

The clerk was opening and slamming drawers. "Around the world for sport," he sang; "around the world for sport."

Richie MacNamara turned. "We were talking to the Parish Priest," he said, "and not to the Parish Clerk." He made the word *clerk* sound like an obscenity.

The old man straightened himself slowly in order to unlock his back. He swivelled deliberately, wet his lips with a meditative tongue, narrowed his eyes to horizontal cuts, and said: "Richie MacNamara, I remember the morning you were christened. An ugly little scaldie with ropes of black hair on you and the bubble in your skull moving in and out." He snorted. "They must ha' been damned fond o' children when they r'ared you."

Richie MacNamara reddened. The priest raised a pacifying hand and said, "Tek-tck-tck." Johnny Mahoon stepped into the breach. Since his son was going for the Church he reckoned that he had a leg in both worlds.

"Father, about that bell. We gave it a fair trial. We're not hasty men. We tested it from all angles and airts and in all winds and weathers. And it's our contention that the bell can't be heard beyond Teerfeeney Cross. We don't know where we are. Father, and that's a solid fact!"

The clerk stopped folding a chasuble to snort: "It can be heard in Moinveenagh and in Derrigo. It can be heard in Clounassig even with a hill between. 'Tis a queer turn in the world that it should skip the holy hollow of Boherbeg."

Johnny Mahoon refused to be deflected. "We couldn't fault th' ould bell, Father. We sat our clocks to it. We began and ended work to it. The wimmin put down the praties to it and we came back from the bog to it. We said our prayers to it. If it was a thing it was a dead bell we said a Lo' th-ha-mercy,

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on the soul of the faithful departed. And if 'twas a Mass-bell we took care to be in good time. And if it was a thing it rang out in the heart of the night we knew that something terrible had happened . . . that there was a fire or . . .

"Or that the Parish Priest had died," said the sepulchral voice somewhere in the deputation.

"God spoke first!" said the clerk sharply, gratuitously implying that Father Fennell might bury the lot of them.

Richie MacNamara brought his face close to the priest's. "We never went ag'in a Parish Priest yet," he half-threatened.

The clerk guffawed and slammed home a drawerful of lace. "Oho, ye did not," he said, "my lovely clean models. Ye never went ag'in a Parish Priest! Except the time of the pews, and the time of the wran dance, and the time of the raffle for the half-a-cow when the puked porter redined the waters of the valley."

"Bridie your tongue, man," ordered Father Fennell. "I never knew them to be other than respectable God-fearing men."

The clerk took a conical candle-extinguisher from the wall and opened the door leading to the sanctuary. He halted in the ope. "What did Father Gibson call ye? The pagans of the parish, with yeer eggs in one another's hay-wynds and yeer knots for ripping calves' guts and yeer three drops of cock's blood on the ace of hearts."

"Hush, hush!" deprecated the Parish Priest in what he pretended was the last extremity of patience.

The clerk clutched the extinguisher as if it were a lance. He raised his voice a full tone: "And ye were never crowned till Father Prendiville called Boherbeg the boondoon of Ireland. Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree! Ye never wint ag'in a Parish Priest! What about the Battle of the Red Gullet when the wounded shoemaker was cured with Ippo-wine and squills?"

He slammed the door with a great hollow sound. The priest turned to the men. "Ye haven't to put up with him the round of the year like I have. When he isn't a duke he's a weasel. May God look down on me. I was a happy man in Ballytarv."

The deputation made belligerent noises of commiseration.

"About the bell," continued the priest evenly, "it was put there to be heard. Nothing else besides."

"You took the word out of my mouth, Father," said Johnny Mahoon.

"I'll tell ye what I'll do. I'll ramble up there one of these days to hear the midday Angelus. Wouldn't that be the best thing I could do?"

IRISH WRITING

"That'll suit us gallant, Father," chorused the men.

"Now what day would suit ye?"

"Any day you name, Father. 'Tis a slack time of the year."

"'Tis that! Well, we'll say Tuesday. Yes, Tuesday." He gave a short laugh. "That is if his lordship will consent to drive the pony to Boherbeg." The tone of his voice implied finality.

Johnny Mahoon was alert. "'Twill go to the rain, Father," he observed.

Judiciously: "I wouldn't agree with you, Johnny."

With sham concern: "Wouldn't you now, Father?"

"No, John. The glass is steady. I'd say 'twould keep hammering away at the frost."

"Maybe you have the right of it, Father. I won't cross your opinion."

The big boots clumped together and flowed awkwardly out of the sacristy. As they went down the road the bell of the chapel began to peal loudly behind them. "Bling: bling," it went; "Bling: bling." One of the men took out his watch and looked at it puzzledly. He could find no reason for the bell's ringing. The plodding men pointed their ears as if to reject the unwelcome sound.

When the pony and trap came to the humped bridge of Boherbeg, the priest and the clerk saw the men standing in a resolute lump. For the most part each man was wearing a navy blue Sunday suit, with a gleaming stud in the neckband of his white shirt. One old fellow wore a clawhammer coat with two black buttons in the back. They all stood there looking at the priest and the clerk with stone dead eyes that had centuries of wisdom in their depths. Beside them flowed a dark chocolate-coloured stream, widening into a pool, on the surface of which see-sawed three or four ducks as true and as pretty as decoys. The boreen, rutted and battered by cart-wheels, stretched away for a mile on the side of the stream. The thatched cabins crouched among the trees on the roadside. The black ridge of the bog-bank reared behind the crouching houses.

They had a saddle-horse ready for the priest. Father Fennell eyed the animal mistrustfully. The clerk descended, and, taking the pony's head, led him forward through the people. They made way with a certain amount of studied indolence. Then the priest came gingerly out of the trap. He was buried in a huge overcoat. After a few words an able-bodied man came forward and tossed the priest into the saddle. He sat

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there having trouble with the tail of his overcoat. He seemed out of breath. The people closed in around him and tried to mesh him in their conversation. Johnny Mahoon took the horse's head and the procession began. After the clerk had tied the pony to a gatepost he sauntered after.

The womenfolk and the children came to the doorways of the cabins. They, too, were dressed in their Sunday best and, catching the priest's eye, they beamed and bobbed in his direction. When they came to Mahoon's, Johnny brought the procession to a halt. His wife Maria was standing at the gatepost. She was dressed in a yellow blouse and black gaberdine skirt. She was a great cudgel of a woman. As the priest approached she kept smoothing her lips with movements indicative of welcome for the royalty that some day would be invested in her son. Under her arm was a large cerise cushion.

"I'm hearing great accounts of Jim, Maria."

"He's a good boy, Father, God bless him."

"Tell him to call up to me when he comes home."

"I will indeed, Father," said Maria Mahoon.

The priest made as if to rein away but at that moment a girl came from behind the woman's dress. The child was carrying a linen-covered tray on which stood a tall glass of milk. "A glass of milk, Father," said Maria Mahoon, proudly.

The clerk was leaning on a low wall of clipped evergreens. He looked truculently at Mahoon's trim cabin. "To hell with thatch!" he said loudly. In the silence that followed he began a kind of tuneless whistling. The people did not turn in his direction.

The priest smiled at the child and, taking the glass of milk, he drank it delicately. Instinctively the people pressed forward to watch his mouth and throat working.

Johnny Mahoon took the cerise cushion from his wife and prisoned it in his free armpit. He led the animal forward over the soft torn road. The procession moved across a little bridge made of sods laid on straight boughs, thence along a passage up to the bogland. The turf of the cutaway was resilient and dry and the unaccustomed odour of the bog-breeze sent the priest into a bout of coughing. Children straggled behind the men: among these children moved the clerk, still at his reedy whistling.

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The crowd came to a halt beside a chair set near a fence. The chair had a tall back and arm rests and was, presumably, the carver from a dining-room set. The fence behind was padded with the paper of old oak leaves and the fibre of coarse hay-rakings so that scarcely a puff of the northern breeze sneaked through it. Johnny Mahoon placed the cushion on the chair. The priest was helped down from the horse. He took his seat without comment. At first he thought he was on a throne but glancing around at the great ring of people he realised that he was in a dock. His eyes fell. At his feet in the frost-blanchéd grass was a sprig of bramble that sported a single scarlet leaf. He kept his eyes downcast and began to gather his breath. When he looked up there was a gap in the people so that from the rising ground he could look down in the direction of the village.

There came a blundering and tearing in the fence behind the seated priest and suddenly from out the oak leaves crashed an old man with greeny coat. He stood on the top of the fence and glared down at the priest and the people. "The country is creeping with druids!" said the clerk. The observation had an unmistakeable grotesque pertinence.

"Who have you ringing the bell, Father?" came a voice from the ring.

"Donal Sullivan."

"A dependable man." It was impossible to say whether this was said ironically or not. The clerk ceased his whistling.

"Great timing!" said Johnny Mahoon bluffly, taking out his watch and looking at it steadfastly.

"'Tis indeed," said the priest looking at his watch. Over the heads of the people he could see the children on the fences silhouetted against the sky.

Priest and people fell silent as each man's ear aimed the east. They had no need to look. All they did was to traditionally shift their boots. Every man could have put his elongated hand backwards and away downhill over the mush-

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rooming rods of the ash-trees and pressed his index finger hard down on the unseen button of the village. A gull whitened in the northern sky while over their heads a crow slowly clapped his black hands.

There was now little or no noise. The horse was tearing at the grass and the people's ears examined the rhythm of this noise and learned to anticipate it. Once behind the priest's back a man made bold enough to crack a match and redden his pipe. But he allowed the pipe to go out after a few puffs that he suddenly realised were resented by the others. Deep somewhere in a slit bog water chuckled.

Now more than ever the priest was encased in his huge over-coat. Twice he threw out flimsy beginnings of conversation but the whispered replies from the men disconcerted him. Eventually he scored a sterling point by looking steadfastly at the turf-ricks, changing his position on the cerise cushion to obtain a better view of them, and corrugating his forehead thoughtfully. Johnny Mahoon was forced to come out into the open and say: "We're not forgetting you, Father. As soon as the passages become anyway reliable we'll draw out the turf and then you'll be the very first decade in our bead."

"How's the enemy now, Father?" queried the man with the deep voice who was suddenly discovered to be a little gnarled man with a fumed-oak face. He had a large cyst on his temple.

The priest took out his watch and looked at it. He kept the face of the watch masked with his thumb.

"In or around, Denis."

"In or around is it, Father?" said Denis slyly. He went back into the ring, hawked and spat on the grass behind him.

The clerk strolled over to the cropping horse, walked around him, and began to declaim:

"They loosed their steeds in the valley
"And Heavens! how glorious to see
"The fine bearded troopers in harness
"Of Rory the Rapparee."

IRISH WRITING

Again the ears probed the east—fruitlessly.

"I'd say 'tis the louvres are at fault," said one man who had the reputation of being a chimney-maker.

"Or the scope of the swing," said another, who had been a hurler in his youth.

"Or the temper of the metal," said a third who hoped to inherit a forge.

The clerk was chanting: "O, I was early idle in that vast barbaric land."

Then a shot—and a second shot ambushed their western and heedless ears. The sounds came from over the immediate horizon of the bogland. The priest popped up out of his over-coat. His head had the precise movements of a ventriloquist's doll. Watches flashed in and out among the old men to offset this distraction. Already the children were deserting. Richie MacNamara of the gravel pit came forward.

"I'd say it has the hour well spoiled now, Father," he said severely.

But the priest was watching a pointer fanning strongly on the upper ridge. Father Fennell was glowing with pleasure. "Ha, ha," he said, "there's a game I served my time to."

The dog, moving in his well loved element, came down towards the people, breasting the strong heather with delighting movements. Then the fowler broke the sky line. He stood for a little space and looked down at the knot of people. The priest had risen from the chair and for a moment the fowler saw the cushion blaze up among the dark press of bodies. He made as if to move away but the cautious movements of his dog attracted him and he came gingerly onwards. He was a tall man with a free stride. The pointer leaped from the turf-bank and nosed in the low ground. The people watched him working forward with multiplying caution. The fowler descended through a gap in the bank. As he did so turf-mould crumbled about his heavy boots.

Then the people of Boherbeg discovered that their priest had escaped.

The fowler stood waiting for Father Fannell who was now approaching with the stride of a boy. The dog slowed before a clump of rushes, then froze in dead set and gently raised his right paw. The priest took the gun from the fowler and

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stole up on the dog. Turn and turn about the dog was taut and quivering. The priest stooped and raised the gun to his shoulder. In this attitude he wasn't as big as a hatching hen. The ring of people crouched and prepared to receive the shot in their western ears.

Then from the east came the sound of the bell. "Pling! Pling! Pling!" it went. "Pling! Pling! Pling!" unmistakeably. The priest wearily lowered the gun from his shoulder and turned a shrewd affectionate face on the people. The dog broke discipline and moved in on the game. The snipe rose and flung himself deftly at the air. With rusty squeakings he was exalted in the sky where he successfully mimicked the blinkings of a skylark.

The clerk popped something into his mouth, grimaced wryly and said, "This is a noble locality for sloes."



MICHAEL MCLAVERTY



Six Weeks On and Two Ashore

IN the early hours of the night it had rained and the iron-gate that led to the lightkeepers' houses had rattled loose in the wind, and as it cringed and banged it disturbed Mrs. O'Brien's spaniel where he lay on a mat in the dark draughty hallway. Time and again he gave a muffled growl, padded about the hall, and scratched at the door. His uneasiness and the noise of the wind had wakened Mrs. O'Brien in the room above him, and she lay in bed wondering if she should go down and let him into the warm comfort of the kitchen. Beside her her husband was asleep, snoring loudly, unaware of her wakefulness or of the windows shaking in their heavy frames. The rain rattled like hailstones against the panes and raced in a flood into the zinc tank at the side of the house. God in Heaven, how anybody could sleep through that, she said—it was enough to waken the dead and there he was deep asleep as if it were a calm summer night. What kind of a man was he at all! You'd think he'd be worrying about his journey to the Rock in the morning and his long six weeks away from her. He was getting old—there was no mistake about that. She touched his feet—they were cold, as cold as a stone you'd find on a wintry beach.

The dog growled again, and throwing back the bedclothes she got up and groped on the table for the match-box. She struck one match but it was a dead one, and she clicked her tongue in disapproval. She was never done telling Tom not to be putting his spent matches back into the box but he never heeded her. It was tidy he told her; it was exasperating if she knew anything. She struck three before coming upon a good one, and in the spurt of flame she glanced at the alarm clock and saw that it was two hours after midnight. She slipped downstairs, lit the lamp, and let the dog into the kitchen. She patted his head and he jumped on the sofa, thumped it loudly with his tail, and curled up on a cushion. On the floor Tom's hampers lay ready for the morning when the boatmen would come to row him out to the lighthouse to relieve young Frank Coady. She looked at the hampers with sharp calculation,

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wondering if she had packed everything he needed. She was always sure to forget something—boot polish or a pullover or a corkscrew or soap—and he was always sure to cast it up to her as soon as he stepped ashore for his two weeks leave. She could never remember a time when he arrived back without some complaint or other. But this time she was sure she had forgotten nothing for she had made a list and ticked each item off as she packed them into the cases. Yes, he wouldn't be able to launch any of his ill-humour on her this time!

She quenched the lamp, and returning to her room she stood at the window for a moment and saw the lighthouse beam shine on the clouds and sweep through the fine wire of falling rain. Tom was still asleep, heedless of his coming sojourn on that windy stub of a rock. But maybe if the wind would hold during the night the boatmen would be unable to row him out in the morning. But even that would be no comfort—waiting, and waiting and watching the boatmen sheltering all day in the lea of the boathouse expecting the sea to settle. It'd be better, after all, that they'd be able to take him. She got into bed and turned her back to him, and as she listened to the rain she thought how it would wash the muddy paw-marks from the cement paths and save her the trouble of getting down on her hands and knees in the morning.

She awoke without aid of the alarm-clock, and from her bed she saw the washed blue of the sky, and in the stillness heard the hollow tumult of the distracted sea. He'd have to go out this morning—there was no doubt about that! But God grant he'd return to her in better form! She got up quietly, and buttoning her frock at the window she gazed down at the Coady's house. The door was open to the cold sun and Delia Coady was on her knees freshly whitening the door-step that had been streaked in the night's rain. All her windows were open, the curtains bulging in the uneasy draught. Delia raised her head and looked round but Mrs O'Brien withdrew to the edge of the window and continued to watch her. Delia was singing now and going to the zinc tank at the side of the house for a bucket of water.

Tom stirred in his bed and threw one arm across the pillow.

"Do you hear her?" his wife said.

"Hear who?" he mumbled crossly and pulled the clothes up round his chest.

"Delia Coady is singing like a lark."

"Well, let her sing. Isn't it a free country."

The alarm-clock buzzed on the table and she let it whirl out to the end of its spring.

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Tom raised his head from the pillow and stared at her. "Isn't it a great wonder you didn't switch that damned thing off and you up before it."

"You better get up, Tom. Delia will think you're in no hurry to take her **Frank** off the Rock."

"I'll go when it suits me—not a second faster. When young Coady's as long on the lights as I am he'll not hurry much. The way to get on in my job is to go slow, slow, slow—dead slow, snail slow, and always slow. Do you remember what one of the Commissioners said to me on the East Light in Rathlin: 'Mister O'Brien,' he said, 'there's not as much dust in the whole place as would fill a match-box.' And the secret is—slow."

"No Commissioner would use such a word as 'match-box'."

—"And do you think, woman, that I'm making up that story. What would you have him say?" and he affected a mincing feminine accent: "'Lightkeeper O'Brien, there is not as much elemental dust in the hallowed precincts of this Lighthouse as would fill a silver snuff-box.' Is that what you would have him say?" he added crossly.

"I don't think he'd pass any remark about dust or dirt."

"You don't think! You don't think! It's a wonder you didn't think of switching off the damned alarm-clock and you knowing I hate the sound of it."

She said nothing. All their quarrels seemed to arise out of the simplest remarks—one remark following another, spreading out and involving them, before they were aware, in a quarrel of cold cruelty. She, herself, was to blame for many of them. She should have let him have his little story of 'the match-box.' What on earth possessed her to turn a word on him and this the last day she'd be speaking to him for six long weeks. She checked a long sigh, tidied the things in the room quietly, and all the time tried to find something to say that would soften her last words to him. She crossed to the window and put her hand to the snib to lower it. Delia was still singing and standing out from the door the better to see the freshly whitened window-sills and door-step.

"She has a lovely frock on," she said over her shoulder. "I never saw her in that before; it fairly becomes her."

"Didn't I tell you she was married in blue! It'll be the same frock."

"She has a nice voice."

"I think you're jealous of her."

"Hm, I used to be able to sing very well myself."

"I must say I heard precious little of it."

"Maybe you didn't! Maybe you'd be interested to know I

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gave that up shortly after we were married—some twelve years ago."

"And whose fault was that!"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, controlling herself.

He pulled the clothes over his shoulder and she pleaded with him to get up and not be the sort that'd deprive another man of even one hour of his leave on shore.

"Is it Frank Coady I'd hurry for! Not me! I'll take my time. I'm over thirty years on the lights and he's a bare half dozen. He doesn't rush much if he's coming out to relieve me."

"You can't blame him and he not long married," she said, scarcely knowing what she was saying as she spoke into the mirror and brushed her hair.

"Last time he came out to relieve me I was waiting for the boat all morning and it didn't come to the afternoon. And what did he say as he stepped ashore: 'God, Tom, I'm sorry the boat's late. I took a hellish pain in my stomach and had to lie down for a couple of hours.' That's what the scamp said to me instead of offering to give me an extra day on account of his hellish pains. Well, I feel tired this morning and I'm not stirring hand or foot for another hour at least!"

She turned round in her chair from the mirror: "I'm beginning to get tired of that word 'tired' of yours. You were tired last night, tired the night before—always tired. You've said nothing else since you stepped ashore two weeks ago. Tired!—it's not out of any consideration you show me. Going off to the pub of an evening and waiting there till somebody gives you a lift home."

"And what do you want me to do? What do you want off me?"

"Oh, nothing," she almost cried, "nothing! I'm used to loneliness now! I'm used to my married widowhood! In my marriage! You won't come for a game of Bridge of an evening. You're tired—you always say. And if I go you won't wait up till I come back. You lower the lamp and go to your bed. Oh, it's a wonder my hair is beginning to turn grey at the temples.

"My own is white!"

"What do you expect and you nearing sixty."

"You're lovely company!"

"Company! Only for the companionship of the old dog I'd go out of my mind."

"If you'd go out of this room I might think of getting up."

"Oh, if I'd thought that I was keeping you back I'd have gone long ago," and she lifted the alarm-clock, the box of matches, and hastened from the room.

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He stretched his arms and looked at the glass of water on the table. He'd not drink that! The stale taste of it would upset him—and what with his stomach upset and his mind upset he'd be in a nice fix for a journey on the sea. He'd smoke a cigarette—and stretching out to the chair for his coat, he lit one, and lay back on the pillows, frowning now and then at the cold air that blew through the open window. He could hear Delia singing and he wondered if Mag sang when she was expecting him home. He doubted it! She was more attached to that damned old dog, and she thought nothing of walking five miles of an evening for a game of cards and bringing the old dog with her. If she were on the Rock for awhile it'd soon tether her, soon take the skip out of her step. Ah, he should have married somebody less flighty, somebody a bit older and settled, somebody that'd enjoy a glass of stout with you of an evening and not be wanting to drag you over the whole blasted country in search of a game of Bridge.

Downstairs he heard Mag opening the front door and letting out the dog for a run, and he heard her speak across to Delia and say how glad she was that it had cleared up in time for Frank's homecoming. Hm, he thought, she's greatly concerned about the neighbours. He looked at the cigarette in his hand, and from the bed he tried to throw it through the open window but it struck the pane and fell on the floor, and he had to get up and stamp on the lighted end.

His clothes were folded neatly for him on the edge of the table: a clean white shirt, his trousers creased, and the brass buttons on his jacket brightly polished. He pulled on the cold, starched shirt and gave a snort of contempt. He wished she'd be less particular—ye'd think he was expecting a visit from the Commissioners on the Rock. Damn the thing you ever saw out there except an exhausted pigeon or a dead cormorant that you'd have to kick into the sea to keep the blowfly from stalking around it. It's remarkable the nose a blowfly has for decaying flesh—flying two or three miles out to sea to lay its eggs on a dead sea-bird. Nature's remarkable when you come to think about it—very remarkable!

Mag tapped the stairs with her knuckles and called out that his breakfast was ready, and when he came down, she glanced at him furtively, trying to read from his face the effect of her remark to him about his white hair. If only she could tell him that she was sorry. But it was better not to—it was better to let it pass and speak to him as if nothing had happened.

"Oh, Tom," she said brightly, "Delia was over to see what time you expected to go."

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"And how the hell do I know at what time I'm expected to go. I'll wait till the boatmen call—and to my own slow and unhurried time."

"She has plenty of paint on, this morning," she added to restore ease.

"Who has?"

"The old boat, I mean," she flashed back.

There it was again: they were back to where they started from—chilling one another with silent hostility or with words that would spurt in lancing fury. Oh, she thought, if only he had shown some of his old love for her during the past two weeks they would not now be snapping at one another, and there would be ease and satisfaction and longing in this leave-taking.

She brought a hot plate of rashers and eggs from the range and poured out tea for him.

"Maybe, Tom, I should run over and tell Delia you'll be ready as soon as the boatmen arrive. I'd like to take the full of my eyes of her place as she does of ours. I always think there's a heavy smell of paraffin in her kitchen. Do you ever find it, Tom?"

"That smell's been in my nose ever since I joined the Lights. Do you know what I'm going to tell you," and he raised the fork in his hand as she sat down opposite him. "There's nothing as penetrating and as permanent as the smell of paraffin. It's remarkable. It seeps into the walls and it would ooze out again through two coats of new paint. It's in my nose and I wouldn't know the differs between it and the smell of a flower."

She smiled, for she at that moment caught sight of two cases of Guinness's stout on the floor and she yearned to tell him jokingly that he had a fine perfume for something else. But she repressed that desire and turned to the dog as he laid his nose on her lap. She threw him a few scraps from the table and he snapped at them greedily. She fondled his head and toyed with one of his ears, turning it inside out.

"It's a great wonder you wouldn't put out that dog and let me get my breakfast in some sort of Christian decency. There's a bad smell from him."

"And you said a moment ago that you could smeil nothing only paraffin."

"Well, I get the smell of him—and that's saying something."

At that moment the dog walked under the table to his side and he made a kick at it and it yelped and ran under the sofa.

"Come here, Brian," she called coaxingly, and the dog came out and walked timorously towards her.

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"Either he goes out of this or I don't finish my breakfast!" Without a word she got up and let the dog out.

"Maybe that'll please you," she said, coming back to the table. "Anything I love, you despise."

"That's a damned lie!"

"It's true—and because you thought I was jealous of Delia you praised her."

"That's another infernal lie!"

"It's too true, Tom. Nothing pleases you—and you used to be so different. You used to be so jolly—one could joke and laugh with you. But of late you've changed."

"It's you that's changed!"

She took her handkerchief and blew her nose. She felt the tears rising to her eyes and she held her head, trying to regain her self-control.

A shadow passed the window. There was a knock at the door and she opened it to admit three of the boatmen.

"We'd like to catch the tide, Mister O'Brien," they said, and lifting the hampers they shuffled out of the house.

Tom finished his breakfast slowly and went upstairs. He came down after a short time, dressed, and ready for the road. In a glance she saw that he hadn't a breast-pocket handkerchief and telling him to wait for a minute she ran upstairs to get one, and coming down again she found that he was gone. She hurried after him and overtook him at the iron-gate.

"Don't keep me back," he said, "didn't you hear as well as I did that we've to catch the tide!" But she held him, and as he tried to wrench himself free she folded the handkerchief into his pocket.

"Tom, don't go away from me like that!" and she looked up at him with an anxious, pleading face.

"You're making a laughing-stock of me!" he said, and pushing the handkerchief out of sight into his pocket he walked off.

She stood at the gate waiting for him to turn and wave his hand to her but he went on stolidly, erect, along the loose sandy road to the shore. He smoked his pipe, the road sloping before him, its sand white in places from the feet of the boatmen and dark with rain where it was untrodden.

The men were already in the boat, baling out the night's rainwater, and as Tom picked his steps over the piles of slabby wrack on the shore they kept calling to him to be careful. They assisted him into the boat and he sat in the stern, his legs apart, and his arms dangling between his knees. The boatmen spat on their hands, gripped the oars, and in a few minutes were out from the shelter of the cove and saw ahead of them

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the black rock with its stub of a lighthouse like a brooding sea-bird. The men rowed with quick, confident strokes, and the boat rose and fell, raking white ridges on the green sward of the sea.

"Take your time," Tom said, "take your time. You're not paid for sweating yourselves. We'll be there soon enough."

They said nothing, and as they came nearer to the rock they saw the white path curving from the top to the water's edge and saw the waves jabbing and shouldering one another in mad confusion. They dipped their oars now with short, snappy strokes, their eyes on the three lightkeepers who awaited them.

"Ye'll have to jump for it, Mister O'Brien, when we give the word. We'll get the cases landed first," and while one held off the boat with a boat hook, two stood at the stern with a case waiting their chance to hoist it on to the outstretched hands of those on shore. When the cases were roped and landed Frank Coady jumped and alighting on the gunwale he balanced himself on one leg as lightly as a ballet dancer. "The fairy godmother!" he said, and folding his arms he spun round on his toe with emphatic daintiness, and then bowing he kissed his fingers to those on shore.

Tom O'Brien lumbered up to him, putting his pipe in his pocket.

"Now, Tom, my lad, let me give you a hand," said Coady, stretching out his hand to him.

"Get away from me, you bloody fool!" said O'Brien, steady-ing one foot on the gunwale.

"Be careful now, Mister O'Brien, be careful!" the boatmen shouted. "Wait till that big fellow passes. Take him on the rise!"

But O'Brien wasn't listening to them. He took his leap on the descent of the wave, missed the path, and was all but dis-appearing into the sea when the lightkeepers gripped him and hauled him ashore.

"I'm all right! I'm all right!" he said, as they laughed at his soaked trousers, the knee-cap cut and the blood oozing out of it.

"Are you O.K., Tom?" shouted Coady from the boat.

"Ah, go to hell, you!" said O'Brien.

"He's a cranky oul devil," Coady said to the boatmen as he took off his coat and lifted an oar. "Now my hearties let us see how you can make her leap!" He pulled on his oar with

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all his strength: "Up, my hearty fellows! Up she jumps! That's the way to make her skip! I'll leave a pint for all hands in the pub! A pint from Frank Coady!"

Near the shore he turned his head and saw his wife awaiting him.

"There she is, my hearty men! Knitting and waiting for her darling Frank!" He threw down his oar and perched himself on the bow ready to jump ashore.

"Take care you don't go like O'Brien," they laughed.

"O'Brien's as stiff as a man on stilts! Here she goes!" and he jumped lightly on to the rock and spinning round he warded off the boat with his foot.

In a minute he was in his wife's arms, and linked together they went off slowly along the sandy road, and for a long time the boatmen could hear him laughing and they knew he was laughing at O'Brien.

Through the iron-gate they went arm in arm. Mag O'Brien was outside her house with the dog and as Frank drew near he told her with much joyous relish how Tom had cut the knee of his trousers.

"He wasn't hurt?" she said.

"Hurt—not a bit! He strode up the path after it like a man in training for the half-mile. The only thing you need to worry about is to get a nice patch." And taking Delia by the hand they swung across to their own house, stood for a minute admiring the whitened doorstep, and going inside they closed the door.

Mag withdrew and sat for a minute at her own window that overlooked their house. Her head ached, and she thought how careless she was in forgetting to pack a bandage or a taste of iodine that he could daub on his bruised knee. One can't think of everything, she said, and she laid her hands on her lap and gazed across at Coady's house that was now silent and still. With an effort she got to her feet and withdrew from the window, and taking a stick she called her dog and set off through the iron-gate and away to the shore that was nearest to the rock.

She scanned the rock and the white path down to the sea. If only he saw her and came out on the parapet as he used to do and signal to her she'd be content—her mind would be eased. She sat down on a green slope and waited. There was

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no stir about the rock, only a gull or two tilting and gliding above the sea. She got up and waved her hand. The dog scratched at the ground, leapt sideways, impatient to be off. She waved again—still there was no sign that she was being seen. She turned and felt the soft wind—it was light and tired: exhausted after its rampage. She stretched herself and stood facing it but it was too weak even to shake her hair. If only it were strong, blowing against her with force she would delight in it. But there was no strength in it—it was indolent and inert, as tired as an old man. She looked once more at the Rock, and seeing a black whorl of smoke rising from it she knew that it was Tom putting on a good fire. He would take a book now, or a bottle of Guinness and his pipe, and after that he would close his eyes and sleep.

The dog barked and ran up the slope after a rabbit. She followed after him and looking to the right she saw the iron-gate and the clump of houses she had just left. There was nothing there but silence and sunlight, and behind her was the stir of the cold sea.



P. J. MADDEN

Chorus from "Barebones"

We remember now the falling leaves last winter
While trees with awful silence told a tale
Like Calvary repeated with no Man upon the Cross
The spontaneous hieroglyphics of a frightened infant.

We remember now the falling leaves in Winter
And the fear that roots were tired and would not
bear
Another Spring's monotony of wonder.

To-night I heard the curlew cry.
To-night I heard the curlew in the wilderness of sky.

The birds begin to trust the year;
The thrush remembers all his notes, the gathering
leaves
Approve his borrowed throat.

The moment's ecstasy upholds the hour.

Perplexed in the moment's endeavour
We dance to the moment's refrain;
The urge of immediate minutes
And the laughter of blood in the veins.

We were born in the Autumn of heroes
Men who sucked the breasts of dreams
And left our infant mouths search cold at the
withered wicks.
Our fathers have left us the dull legacy.
God have mercy on us.

What has this weary night brought with its weary
dawn?
In the night we have heard the usual sounds, we have
had the usual fears
And the morning was usual promising nothing.

P. J. MADDEN

What sounds have we heard in the night?
The growl of a dog at the gate, the cry of a child
in its sleep

And the tide on the shore, the wave in the tide and
the dry pulse of the sea.

In the night we are huddled together afraid to sleep.
And our voices are one, laughing and crying
And our voices rise up together.
Our hearts and our souls are gathered in one.

We have envied the bird its solitary flight.
We have seen the solitary daffodil confounded in
an hour

With a thousand offspring, and the loathsome rat
runs in the grass

With the squeak of his kind.

All things repeat a pattern and are exhausted.

Sometimes we outlive the essential moment.
In the silent hours in the night we are fragments
of memory

Urging the pattern to live,
And the earth and the seas become shapeless despite
the pattern,

And the dog growls in an awful distance
The child is a cry and only a cry
And the wave and the tide are distance and time.

We are in space

We are in time building the pattern
And the pattern crumbles in time and in space leaving
the pattern.

We have been awake in the night in the silent hours
When the world slips away

And the earth and the seas become shapeless
And man is an untidy wisp blown to resemblance of
something

That never lasts, but the resemblance crumbles and
the something
Is always different.

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We have criticised the pattern, we have heard a faint
music in life

And we are the music, time and the pattern.

Perplexed in the moment's endeavour,
We dance to the moment's refrain;
The urge of immediate minutes
And the laughter of blood in the veins.

We remember now the falling leaves in Winter.

JIM EDWARDS

From An Album

EVERYTHING my father did became a ritual after a while. He liked people and things to come around again and again in an orderly pattern, so that he could make the same gestures and jokes, get the same responses without fail. My Sunday evenings of three long winters were spent up in the bakehouse with him, yet to the very last one he would get ready to go out alone after tea on Sunday. And he would be putting on his hat before he'd ask, casually, whether I'd care to go with him.

"All right," I'd reply, and leave my exercises to struggle madly into my coat, scarf, cap and gloves in the hall. He hated being delayed, but was always surprisingly pleased at my pleasure. Those Sunday evenings in the bakehouse were sheer heaven to me, and I think now that my unceasing chatter made a soothing background for dad's dreams.

We always went the same way to the bakehouse: by Great William O'Brien Street, Gerald Griffin Street, Shandon Street, up Cattle Market Lane and finally across the dark space of Old Market Place, passing roaring, shuttered pubs and steaming fish and chip shops.

Once inside the bakehouse we'd peel off our Sunday coats and, feeling very important in my shirtsleeves, I'd go off hunting paper: jam-stained pieces from the trays, crinkly wrappings, old newspapers and so on, and with an armful of these I'd follow dad down the blackbeetly passage between the coke-heaps and the ovens. It was always deliciously warm down there, warm and buzzing with flies.

We never had any trouble with the fires; after a starter of a broken-up butter-box would go a few scoops of coke, and then, after clanging both doors shut with my shovel, I'd follow dad back to the big table, where a long list of orders would be awaiting his perusal. "Ah, dash," he'd begin muttering angrily. He had been with the firm ever since its very humble beginning. "How does he expect me—" Then he'd notice me hanging around. "Would you like a cake?"

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There were always lots of cakes to choose from, but the creamy ones with the thick piping on top were my favourites, and after one of them I'd feel stuffy and a little sick—but that too was Sunday evening.

Getting the Christmas holly was another of our rituals. Coming on towards Christmas, I'd begin telling dad all about it, all we would do and find, and he would listen or seem to listen, which is all that a boy needs to make his spoken dreams come to life. Then one cold day we'd catch the bus to Blarney, and wander off into the dark woods looking for holly bushes, and honest to God I think dad enjoyed scrambling up the slippery paths more than I did. It was usually dark before we got back to the village again, and the lounge of the hotel always seemed to be packed with doggy red-faced men: with these dad drank and joked, while I sat on a couch with a bottle of lemonade, feeling very conscious of the red-berried bunch of holly pricking my legs.

I was always a very unpopular little boy going home in the bus, for I was certain to scratch a hand or a pair of silk-clad legs, or—and a much more heinous crime—the back of a greyhound; but dad passed off all mutterings with his most lordly air.

He used to go away every summer, but that was before my time. I remember receiving strange toys from Scotland, and once my elder brother and sister went with him to Dublin and on to the Isle of Man. Later, when my brother and sister grew too big for "that sort" of thing, dad spent his holidays with mother and me, and I have a faint, faint memory of him, a straw boater on his head, sauntering down a sunny, gravelly station-platform after a gay crowd. That was down in Crosshaven, I think.

Crosshaven was our favourite spot for a long time, and if any memory of dad stays with me all my life it will be of him walking slowly up one of the fuchsia-banked roads, the crook of his stick over his arm, dabbing at a half-made cigarette with a moistened finger-tip.

Once the two of us 'bussed it over Farmer's Cross, and began walking down a pretty wooded valley towards Carrigaline. The road was hot and dusty, and when we heard a rattling noise behind us dad held up his stick. The noise was made by a small lorry, piled high with crates of lemonade, and the parts of it that weren't loose and shaking were tied with twine. The

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driver squinted out of the cabin at us. "Hello," he said.

Two minutes later I was wedged between the driver and dad in the smelly cabin, listening to them swopping yarns about trade and work. Dad was like that sometimes; he could make a man his friend with a glance and a word.

It's hard to believe now that dad was once gay and sun-loving, gay and very grand. He was an aristocrat too; conventions and other people's opinions just didn't exist for him. Once mother, dad and I went to the pictures together, and as we went up through the curtains and into the semi-darkness we lost him, and were whisked away down the aisle by an efficient usherette, leaving him alone and floundering. "Mother! Jimmy!" he called pettishly.

I was just going to call out when my mother pinched my arm. "Let him alone," she hissed. "We'll find him later."

"Mother!" dad called again, and then to our horror he lit a match, held it over his head, and stared around him in a little glow of light. "Where are you?" he called.

"Let him be!" she whispered urgently, acutely conscious of isolated giggles in the darkness.

We marked the place where he finally subsided, and picked him up as he left. "Where did you go?" he asked angrily.

"Where did *you* go!" said my mother.

I only understood her feelings in full a year or two later, when dad called up an Opera House programme-seller in order to show her how he rolled cigarettes. (Dad rolled his own fags, tired, crumpled and jaded things). He had noticed the programme-seller watching him make one. "Come up here and I'll show you," he said with a pleased smile. The pit was crowded, and the programme seller was young and pretty. She came up the aisle unwillingly. Dad rolled a cigarette, slowly and with vain care—it was as crumpled a cigarette as he ever made—while I squirmed in my seat. "D'you see now?" he said at last.

"Yes, sir," said the programme-seller, and glared balefully at me as she escaped. No one in that part of the pit was sold a programme that evening.

Oh, I nearly forgot: dad was a Communist.

He liked to shock people, and always managed to bring the

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church into every argument that arose. "Look at Russia now compared to what she was before '17!" he'd say with a fine show of anger, and the pious aunts and uncles would glance at each other, and mother would blush and try to hush him up.

He was tickled to death when some trouble-raiser in the street spread the rumour that he was on Moscow's payroll. On Moscow's payroll! I've never seen dad laugh more heartily than when he was told it. The tears streamed down his cheeks and time and time again he lifted his face to chortle afresh. Heaven only knows why he should receive a Red cent. He knew sweet damn all about Communism, and his knowledge of Russia was taken from a few travel books. But for twenty years "they" made my mother suffer for her bad man.

Right to the time he got sick he was a great man for a joke; any kind of joke (he used to enjoy the wisecracks of us kids for months), but especially practical jokes. We hadn't a quiet house in those days, and many's the time he chased me down the staring street in his shirt sleeves, and once he pulled me out of bed, down the stairs, and threw me out on the street, slamming the door behind me. I was dressed in a long, billowing nightshirt and though it was summer, the three seconds that passed before I could get the door open again will remain with me for ever.

But holidays, wanderings, and jokes came to a gradual end; we kids grew up, and dad became very quiet and tired, and reserved in himself. "It was growing in him all the time, you know," the doctor told my mother when all was over.

Then he got the first attack and was out of work for a month with uncertain eyesight and balance. Four months later came the second, and we were told he was finished with work for ever. He guessed that also, and he felt it more than anything else, more than his treacherous eyesight or half-crippled left side.

Three weeks before he died he got his third stroke in a cinema. We were up every night of the three weeks with him, for he could do nothing for himself; his time sense was jumbled up, and he would want his breakfast in the middle of the day, his dinner in the middle of the night. He grew worse, until he could not take the milk we tried to spoon on him. That was on the last night of all, when the flesh had drained

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from the bones of his face, leaving them stark and staring, and his half-closed eyes had become lashed with yellow mucus. His hard, dry breathing became faster and faster, and he was dead by half-past two in the afternoon of the following day.

I went up to the room as few times as possible. Once I had to put some blinds on the windows, and the strong-armed nun had turned him half on his face and you'd swear he was alive; that was worst of all.

Later on the house filled and there was much weeping from relatives and neighbours. But I thought the hawknosed thing on the bed had very little to do with my father. It was his corpse, it is true, but it wasn't dad.

No, dad wore a straw boater, and sauntered along sunny roads with me, hailing ramshackle lorries, chased me through dripping woods, or muttered above my head in the bakehouse. He used to make me laugh myself sick over books called "Three Men In A Boat," and "Three Men On The Bummel," and, if one is permitted to make one's own paradise, dad is on a glorious strawboated bummel right now, and only waiting for me to join him.

And some day I will.



J. F. REYNOLDS



Prometheus

HAVE you ever worked for twelve months, week after week, day after day, in the same small room doing the same interminable job with no one with you to talk to, nothing to see from your window but an ugly building and nine other windows which stare in at you? You have not? And you would not like to? Well then, please do not congratulate me on my good job.

Oh I am very tired of people telling me how fortunate I am in having a safe job in times like these. Yes, I have a safe job, and I must admit I am not overworked. I do not have to be in early in the mornings and I am finished at five o'clock every evening except Saturday, when I am off at one o'clock and of course Sunday, when I do not have to work at all. But I do not desire congratulations.

For a whole year now I have worked in this office alone. People pass in and out occasionally, but most of the time I am on my own. Nothing but me and a deliberate clock and this window from which I can see a dreary street and other blank, staring windows. Still, that cannot be so very bad, you say. After all, your work can keep your mind occupied and at five o'clock each day you are free. Think of the poor convicts in Port Laoigshe, what about them? Ah yes, they have a bad time; but no one tells them how lucky they are in having a snug position, with not too much work, regular hours, and little danger of being dismissed. No, of course you would not say that to them. It would be slightly grotesque, would it not? Yet people say it to me. Tall, broad-shouldered men I meet in public houses look at me enviously when I tell them where I work. "Ah," they say, their eyes darting at me, "and you will get a pension after that too, won't you?" Oh yes, I shall get a pension all right. After forty years I shall be entitled to look for my pension. "Yes," I say, "you are right there." And I buy them a drink and leave them, walking home through the streets alone. It is no use talking to people like that.

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I have often wondered which is the worst—to be overworked, to have to slave all day without ever once getting a moment to read the paper or to have, as we say, a louze; or to have so little to do that a difficult piece of work would be welcomed with relief. In my early days in the office, I used to discuss this matter with my colleagues almost daily. It was a problem so subtly touched with humour that it had a constant appeal for us. Hughes, Kenny and myself would debate it regularly, deeming it more important than the latest news from Abyssinia. I can still see Kenny half-sitting on his hands which he is warming on the radiator, his brows humorously arched, his voice containing just that shade of wisdom and authority which delighted us so much. But no matter how I try now, I cannot sink into that mood of mock-philosophical good humour in which we then examined all our problems. Perhaps I have become cranky before my time, but it is nauseating to me now to hear other young fellows talk and argue in the same affectedly grave manner which once so charmed me.

The truth is that I have experienced the two aspects of this problem so fully that I am afraid I am a little touchy on the subject. If I am not overworked now, there were times when I was.

Do you know how it feels to do nothing but tot column after column of figures for days at a time? If you do, you will know how I felt, how my eyes burned as I lay awake in bed, how my brain refused to stop totting even when I was asleep. Often I would wake up at nights and find my brain racing . . . ten and seven, seventeen . . . and seven, twenty-four . . . three, twenty-seven . . . eight, thirty-five . . . Even when talking to people I would find it hard to understand what they were saying, my mind was so busy doing furious long tots. And walking along the streets, that was the worst. Passing by railings was a torture. My eyes would go leaping along them . . . two, four, six, eight, ten . . . It was only with the greatest effort that I could turn my head away.

It was a bad business really. The funny thing was that I got quite a reputation for being a bit of a genius at tots. They would come into me with books in their hands. Always it was the same. "Liam, I wonder would you run up this tot for me?" or "I don't seem to be able to get this tot right, Liam. Would you mind checking it for me?" And of course I could never refuse them. I just could not say "No" to them. Often I screamed inside me "No, no, no, NO!" but my lips would

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move politely and say "Why, yes, of course."

Yet, sometimes I even welcomed these interruptions. I was so tired being alone that I was glad of any opportunity to enjoy the presence of others. But my interruptors rarely stayed long to talk with me. Somehow we could never find anything to talk about. Since I had been transferred to this office, I had lost touch with my old friends and I never became intimate with my new colleagues. We called each other by our Christian names, but that was merely a polite custom: each of them is still to me a strange, unknowable creature. I suppose it is really my fault. I have often seen them talk for hours with each other, and yet, when one of them comes to me, he finds the atmosphere constrained. Neither of us can find anything to say, and so it is always a relief when an excuse is found to end our awkward silence and get to our work again. It is a pity really, because I do like talking.

It is that room I work in. The closed, cramped atmosphere of it seems continually about me, hindering me from doing anything. When I attempt to talk to people a kind of lump rises in my throat and I make queer noises trying to get rid of it. I suppose I seem so embarrassed that they get embarrassed too. But I repeat, I like talking. That is why I walk the streets at night. That is why I come into public houses. I like meeting people, and I like hearing them talk. When you have a job like mine you learn the value of human companionship.

Really it is not a bad little office. It is small, neat and, at least so it seemed to me when first I saw it, very cosy. There is only room for one desk, a few chairs, and a press. The walls are bare with the exception of the one facing me which supports a fine, though rather old-fashioned clock. At first I was delighted with this clock because, I must confess, I never had a watch of my own. The idea of having a grand clock all to myself pleased me. I shall never be at a loss to know what time it is now, I said, I shall always know when lunch hour or five o'clock is approaching and so be prepared. But it was not very long before this feeling wore off me. I grew to hate that clock. Now I should give any money if only they would take it away from me. You do not know how its maddening, persistent ticking gets on my nerves. But there is nothing I can do about it. I often thought of going to the boss and asking him as a favour to have the clock removed; but I could never bring myself to do it. You know the way these people look at you when you ask them the simplest things. They attribute

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all sorts of underhand motives to you. So the clock is still looking down on me each day, mocking me with its unhurried ticking.

There is one large window in the office. Nothing much can be seen from this except a narrow street, lined on both sides with tall commercial buildings. You can see a small patch of sky, but you can never see the sun until the late afternoon when sometimes it squeezes through the top right corner of the window, being more of a nuisance than anything else with its dazzling light. From where I sit at my desk my view through the window is restricted to nine of the windows in the building at the far side of the street.

Oh I could talk all night of those nine windows that stand out in that ugly building, starkly naked and black. They are horrible things, showing nothing of the life behind them, showing nothing but the pale, soulless sky.

Looking at these, it is hard to believe that there is life behind them, that they hide people who work and pass most of their lives sitting at desks. I know I should certainly doubt it were it not for the fact that I do see these people occasionally when they come to look down on the street.

One of them is a girl. I suppose I had better call her a girl, though it always seems strange to me to call a woman over thirty a girl. Looking at her saddens me. I am very sentimental about women: you would not believe how it hurts me to see them in an office. Women and babies and homes and gardens and sunshine, these always seem to me to be part of each other, to be necessary to each other. That is why I think women are loveliest among flowers and why the sun has always something metallic about it in the city. Often I have watched this girl as she came out of the darkness and stood by the side of the window looking down, ready if necessary to withdraw quickly into the shadows. I could never see her very clearly, so it is impossible for me to say whether she is really good-looking. But I must confess, I do not think she is. She is a strange woman leading a strange life behind a black window. No, I do not think she is beautiful.

I do not see this girl very often. She only appears at times, darting hurried glances from the corner of the window and then disappearing again. It is the man who leans against the sill of the centre window whom I know best. I have seen him so often now that I can picture every line in his face. It is

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sad, that face of his—or maybe it is merely bored. I do not think the man has very much work to do, because he spends a great deal of time at this window, smoking. It is so dark in the window that I only see a face, collar, hands and cigarette; the rest of him is just part of the blackness. It is strange seeing that disembodied head and those floating hands. You feel that they should have some significance, but the longer you watch them the more unreal they appear. Those two hands, the one remaining motionless, the other making soft, waving journeys upwards and downwards to and from the pallid face, carrying with it its tiny red light, fascinate me by their utter meaninglessness, their complete lack of all purpose.

Other people appear at these windows from time to time. I see their grey faces staring into the arid valley of the street. I try not to heed them, but their presence affects me like a pain behind the eyes. I am very tired of them.

Really, I must sound a queer sort of a fellow indeed. When no one is looking out of these windows, I am tormented, their terrible emptiness oppresses me. I can think of nothing, I can do nothing but sit daily at my desk, feeling their presence. I try not to look at them, as I try not to listen to the clock. And when they are not empty, when someone is standing by one of them looking on the street, it is as bad. The dull, incurious eyes of these watchers madden me. Have they no life in them either? I wonder, have these windows destroyed them, taking the soul from their eyes?

It is hard, it is very hard passing your life away like this. I told a man once that my work was driving me queer and he laughed at me. "Listen, son," he said, giving me a great slap on the back, "you have a cushy job, and you know it. Cushions never broke anyone's heart." I have often thought of that man's unsympathetic heartiness. No, cushions cannot break you, can they? But they could smother you. I should not like to be smothered by cushions.

It is this office of course that makes me feel like this. If I were in a crowded office with other fellows and with girls talking and perhaps laughing, things would be easier. But here in this small room with this clock, with these windows, with these staring people, oh you do not know how difficult it is.

There are times when I am terrified by it all. My life is oozing slowly away, and I am helpless to stop it. The clock counts minute after minute of it as they slip by, and the windows are watching.

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To-morrow things will change, I have made up my mind about that. I am going to go to Mass: things will be different then. I am a Catholic, you know, and I believe in the Mass. It is a long time now since I have been to Mass on a working day. When I went to this job first, I used to go every morning. I was a daily Communicant. Now I lie awake in the morning waiting for the bells to ring, and then decide it is really too late but that to-morrow I shall make a fresh start.

I do not know how I became lazy and slothful. I do not know how I grew into the habit of counting the minutes until the bell for Mass rang, and then counting the chimes of the bell itself, weakly deciding that it was too late now. All the time I keep thinking of the clock in my office ticking, ticking, ticking. I lie awake, staring at the ceiling, thinking of that small room, seeing before me those black, vacant windows. Sometimes I fall asleep again, and wake up miserably tired. I have to drag myself out of bed and scramble downstairs to a hurried breakfast. Somehow I generally manage to be in work in time.

I have grown careless about my appearance. Look at me now! Look at my shoes, they have not been cleaned for weeks. Look at my collar, it is creased and dirty. I badly need a haircut. Oh, it is no use protesting,—I am a slovenly person. I am weak and shiftless. You would not trust me with anything important, would you now? I suppose I am lucky to have a job at all. It is not so bad really. Perhaps I should never have been able to hold any other position. At least they will not sack me here. And in forty years time I shall be free and comfortable with my pension and my small savings.



EOIN F. NEESON



Cuchulain's Steeds

Magnificent
The pair he drives.
Two steeds of equal size are they
Like day and night.
Curling their manes, and long,
And as they come,
From out their curbed jaws
Fire leaps and flicks,
So strain and bound they forward.
Beneath their feet
The turf is thrown so high around
It seems as though
A flock of darting birds do follow them.
And through it all,
The blood-flecked nostrils
And the eyes
Of each brave steed
Are like the fairly lights that dance across the hill.
On one side, broad and strong,
His head erect, a grey,
That swift and wild and prancing as he goes,
Moves madly o'er the plain.
The other, firm and slender,
Is a black.
And as he moves
His muscles ripple in the shimmering sun
Like western breezes gently breathing
O'er the surface of Lough Conn.
Worthy the chariot in which he rides
Is he who sits within.

(From a play, "Cuchulain")

TERENCE SMITH



Eyes and No Eyes

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

The Characters

Abina, aged 55.
James, aged 50.
Peggy, aged 15.
Phil, aged 14.

The sitting-room of a small suburban house. Bay-window centre. Door right. Fireplace left. On either side of the fireplace a roomy old-fashioned armchair. That on the near side faces the room. Beside it there is a small table with an electric lamp and some knitting. A large table with tea things on it stands right centre. Around the table some chairs, one of which on the left side, faces out. The furnishing is a mixture of solid old-time pieces and contemporary gimerack.

It is a bright summer evening just after sunset. Through the open window, above the houses on the other side of the road, the sky, its colour not yet fading is visible. *Abina* is arranging things at the table. Aged about 55, she is a stout, pleasant, brusque and light-hearted person. Her innocence, which is great, is well disguised by her good sense. *Peggy* and *Phil* appear at the window. *Peggy* wears a white dress with jacket. She appears anxious. *Phil*, in open shirt and blazer, looks sullen. Both carry tennis rackets. Still unseen by *Abina*, *Peggy* "spots" her, looks round the room as if in search of something else, and turns to *Phil*, shaking her head. Then she calls out.

PEGGY. Cousin Bina!

ABINA. (starts and turns) Peggy!—Oh! You gave my heart a fright.

PEGGY. Gosh: I'm sorry.

ABINA. Asha, that's all right. (Advancing towards them) How are you, Peggy. And how is Phil. I was expecting ye'd come along, but not that way—at the window. Ye'll have some supper?—Listening out I was for James's key in the door.

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PEGGY. (surprised) Is he not back yet?

ABINA. (stopping dead) *Before* you, is it! . . . 'Tis ye should know where he is! . . .

PEGGY. We? How could we? . . . This way it is . . .

ABINA. What's all this about?

PHIL. (speaking up) We weren't along with Cousin James at all to-day.

ABINA. (groaming in spirit) You missed him, is it! Goodness gracious, ye're the omadhauns! I heard him telling *ye* a dozen times the last day ye were here where to meet him and when and how—and yet ye muddle it! Ugh!

PHIL. (stung) We didn't muddle it, we aren't so foolish. 'Twas the way that we clean forgot.

ABINA. About the outing!

PEGGY. I know it's awful, but we never thought of it till half an hour ago.

PHIL. Right in the middle of a game of tennis—and then we came here straight.

ABINA. (sickened) Sure, *my* poor brother! After all his planning!—Ye ought to be ashamed!

PHIL. Well, we're sorry Cousin Bina. We came to tell him that.

ABINA. Oh, yes, ye're sorry—'tis easy said.—But wait awhile till I let *ye* in . . . (She goes out)

PEGGY. Now we're in for it!

PHIL. I told you so.

PEGGY. Come on.

(They leave the window. A few moments later *Abina* returns, leading the others in. She has begun her scolding.)

ABINA. . . . When I think of it! My brother James! A man as old—a great deal older than the two of *ye* put together! He plans this treat for you, this Sunday sally—out, and then, if you please, you both forget! (sits on chair left of table) Och, I'm thinking 'twould be long he waited, watched the buses for the pair of *ye* at Blaney's Cross!

(*Peggy* sits on arm of chair left front, looking across at *Abina*)

PEGGY. But why on earth would he wait on? When we didn't get there at the time he said—

ABINA. Ah, that's all you know!—He'd still be hoping, saying to himself ye were just delayed. And the day so perfect for Castlecarney! He wouln't have it that it *could* be spoiled! . . .

PEGGY. And maybe 'twasn't.

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ABINA. What's that you say!

PEGGY. I mean—once he gave us up. He'd make the best of it.
And then—who knows—he may have enjoyed his day.

ABINA. (scathing) Enjoyed it! How?

PEGGY. Well, he went on anyway. It isn't as if he came back.

ABINA. And what sort of day would you call that—all alone by himself!

PEGGY. (reasonably) A good day maybe. For him, I mean.
Isn't he always that way—by himself?—Whatever else,
it isn't *company* that interests Cousin James! (leaning
forward, with a spasm of interest) Oh, what is it?
What's *beside* . . . his pipe, his papers, his little walks? . . .
(*Phil*, who has picked up a flute from a side-table left,
'blows down it mournfully')

PEGGY. His flute! Is that—

ABINA. (glad of the interruption) Put it down at once. And
let me tell you he's very good at it. Oh, yes, he plays
Mozart! (accent on last syllable)

PHIL. Never heard of it. (He replaces flute, and sits on a stool
right).

PEGGY. Heavy music. I had to play it on the piano once. But
then I struck—I couldn't stand it.—And think of Cousin
James! . . .

ABINA. Ah, sure it's only now and then he ever takes it up.

PEGGY. Even that! Has he no real interest?

PHIL. Obviously none.

PEGGY. It's like his questions!

ABINA. (defensive but arrested) Like his questions? What on
earth do you mean?

PEGGY. Oh, he's a terror, Cousin Bina, the way he asks us
about things! Hockey—

PHIL. Football.

PEGGY. Film stars.

PHIL. Your favourite this or that.

PEGGY. You wouldn't mind, but he doesn't get you, doesn't
heed what you say!

PHIL. He'll meet you next time with the same old questions—
over and over to the Day of Doom!

ABINA. (holding up her hands) Children, children, that's enough!
You belittle your Cousin James!—Who'd conjecture from
the way you speak the man who was in it, so good and
true! And so well thought of in his own capacity. Aye,
did ye not know? With Mr. Morris, the solicitor, he's
right hand man and more. And look at me: where would
I be if he hadn't given me a decent home?—Oh, indeed,

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there's many things, many things on his mind! So don't be blaming him if he isn't taken by all yeer odds and ends!

PEGGY. I know—I know he isn't taken. But why does he *hang on*?

ABINA. (quietly) And yet you say he has real interest!

PEGGY. (rather appalled as the meaning dawns on her) You mean he has—in us?

ABINA. (rising; as much vexed with her brother as with the young people) Too much he thinks of ye! If I were he, I'd let ye both go hang!

PHIL. (claps his hands; amicably) Hear, hear: I wish you were!

ABINA. (by window) I tell you what, if you let me down. I wouldn't bear with ye! Oh, no, begor, I'd be like a major, swearing oaths at ye both! (They laugh appreciatively) But he's too quiet . . . Tender-hearted . . . (hesitating) Maybe I should tell?—To know ye better was his great idea, the hope that he had in this day. Oh, my dears, for a week before he was in a state! All a—tremor—trying the glass, and looking out at the sky! . . . (As she too looks out, her attention is caught) Holy Mother, here he is, coming in at the gate! . . .

PEGGY. Cousin James?—He's coming, Phil!

PHIL. What about it? (very cool) I'm not afraid.

PEGGY. Nor am I. But it's slightly awkward—

ABINA. (turning) Arra, stop that talk! You'd think he'd eat you. (turning back) I declare, he's smiling . . . to Mr. Cooney across the way. Now he's turning . . . smiling still and looking at the flowers . . .

PHIL. Perhaps he's merry?

(*Phil* and *Peggy* relieve their feelings by a spurt of laughter)

ABINA. (indignant) Phil, for shame!

PHIL. (with a sting) I know, I know: he never takes a drop.

ABINA. (turning to the youngsters, but still keeping an eye to the window) Look, 'twould be better that ye both went off . . . out by the back way. (*Peggy* rises with alacrity, but *Phil* feels bound to show more sang froid) 'Tis well I see the way ye'd meet him, and I wouldn't have it like that at all. I'll tell James that ye came along to say ye were sorry, and that'll do. Ah, so much better—

PEGGY. So much better?

ABINA. Aye, as if 'twas meant.

PEGGY. (a little piqued) And don't we mean it?

ABINA. No, my dear, ye're only a bit vexed. (Going towards

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door) But there, ye're young, 'tis only natural (opens door) Go on quickly now.

PEGGY. Cousin Bina, you're a dear. (kisses *Abina*) Good night.

PHIL. And, Cousin Bina, put him off if he thinks of this again.

ABINA. (grimly) Oh, *he* won't think of it!

PHIL. O.K. by us. (shaking her hand) 'Tis better that way, isn't it—all round?

ABINA. (a little sadly) I suppose so.—Go on now.

PEGGY and PHIL. (whispering as they steal away) Good night.

(*Abina* closes the door, and goes to the window. She watches a moment, and shakes her head. Suddenly she walks away to chair left, sits down, picks up some knitting from side-table, and holds it on her lap while she listens. She nods her head, takes up her work, and is knitting in a leisurely manner when *James* enters.

James is tall and thin, with a streak of grey-black hair falling over his forehead. He gives the impression, incongruous in a man of his age, of a lanky lad who has outgrown his clothes. He shares his sister's innocence, but being more vulnerable, he is less candid than she, and expresses himself sometimes by an ambiguous chuckle that ranges between ruefulness and cheer. He stands at the door which he has closed behind him, and smiles at *Abina*. In one hand, hanging downwards, he carries a spray of woodbine.)

ABINA. Well, where *were* you, in the name of goodness?

JAMES. At Castlecarney, of course.

ABINA. You went there, did you, in spite of everything?

JAMES. (sitting in chair right centre) I did.

ABINA. You see I know—I know what happened. Peggy and Phil were here. They came to say they were very sorry. Truly, they were ashamed. They . . . forgot it, silly things. I . . . didn't let it pass!

JAMES.—I see. I see. Sure it doesn't matter.

ABINA. (with a spasm of irritation) Oh, there you go again!

JAMES. How, Abina?

ABINA. So . . . forgiving. Lookit, James, it's really very deep. How much better if you have a grievance, simply to spit it out!

JAMES. (smiling) I know, Abina. I shouldn't hide things. I'll never hide anything again from you. And so 'tis honest, I have no complaint against the children.—Heaven help us, what *complaining* would you ever hear from a cock on a gate! And that's how I am. Free and easy. I

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feel like wishing everyone good luck . . .

ABINA. (staring at him) I do believe it! Upon my word, the day in the open has done you a power of good! (He nods, still smiling, and leans back) But how—but what—? . . . Ah, there you're tired. I'll get your supper first.

(*Abina* has put down her knitting, and is half way across the floor when *James* raises a detaining hand)

JAMES. No, Abina, I had my supper.

ABINA. (stopping) You *had* it? Where?•

JAMES. At the side of the road . . . Are you forgetting that I had the basket with all the good things, eh?—I forgot it, to tell the truth, till I rose up to go home—and there it was—on the ground beside me—a staggering surprise!

ABINA. (scrutinizing him) 'Twas time you opened it.

JAMES. Ah, no, not there—I had my supper a bit further on. Going homewards the road dips down—and there I halted. 'Tis the last you see of Castlecarney wood. A time I dawdled, noticed on my hands the kindly colour of the dropping sun. And bees all round me. Oh, the bees! Oh, the company there is in bees!

ABINA. Sh what old talk!—!

JAMES. (not heeding; lifting his spray of woodbine) Look, Abina. Look at this. A spray that I broke off . . .

ABINA. (trying to be at ease) Woodbine, is it? Very nice. I'll put it in a glass.

(*Abina* takes the woodbine, and goes out. *James* rises as if to follow her, then stops and thinks a moment, his head down. He is teased, it seems, by some question, for he strikes a fist in the palm of his hand quickly and softly three or four times, and in this way, his head up now, he walks musingly to the window. There he repeats his former gesture, his face undiscernible, for it is dark now, and only his figure is clear against the fading light).

JAMES. (joyously enlightened; but in a low voice) Eyes And No Eyes! . . .

(*Abina* has re-entered with the woodbine in a glass, and she stops dead, staring across at him)

ABINA. (low and startled) Goodness, James! (His silhouette turns) What's come over you—talking to yourself like that!

JAMES. (after a slight pause) I've just remembered Eyes And No Eyes! . . . Do you remember? My old book? . . .

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ABINA. Eyes And . . . Ugh! 'Tis a queer name . . .

JAMES. (very low) Grasses grew from it, wild flowers . . .

ABINA. (crying out as at the same time she drops and smashes the glass) James! . . .

JAMES. (still low) Abina? . . . What's the matter? . . . Why did you drop that glass? . . . (with the faintest chuckle) Are you thinking I'm gone off my head—like poor mother? . . .

ABINA. (breathing her relief) Oh! . . . (advancing and touching his arm) You're all right, aren't you? . . .

JAMES. (laughing gently, touched by her alarm) Of course I am. Never better in all my life. Sit down, Abina. (he places her in chair left) I'll put on the light. (switches on table lamp) There, you can see me now . . . (he kneels on one knee for a moment, smiling, so that she may see him in the full light)

ABINA. Ah, that's better! . . . I'm a silly woman . . . (smiling and crying a little, she puts a handkerchief to her eyes)

JAMES. (who has risen; looking down at her) You've worried haven't you—over me? (Still smiling and busy with her handkerchief, she nods away) Steady, girl! I wasn't—no, I wasn't going daft! (She shakes her head at the very idea). But maybe—maybe you were on the track. I was getting a bit odd.—But now . . . I'm right. I'm right, Abina. (Flaps his arms once). Patched and perfect—like a mended doll . . .

ABINA. Ah thank God! (James sits in chair right centre, drawing it nearer to *Abina*, centre) I know I'm foolish, but when you spoke . . . of a book with grass . . .

JAMES. (his eyes alight) You must remember Eyes And No Eyes!—I used to read it at the end of the day. After homework.—Holy Moses, there was always a heap of that to do! And woe betide me if it wasn't finished before I opened my precious book! Father, God rest him, was a stern man and heavy with his hand! (*Abina* nods once or twice.) So my work was a double labour—a kind of tunnel to reach the light!—Eyes and No Eyes! . . . 'Twas all about the ways of birds and flowers.—Oh, my joy when the page was opened! I wasn't reading—I was looking through . . . to ferns, finches . . . little creatures . . . things I'd happened on myself that day! Or looking forward to what I'd find—tomorrow maybe, with a bit of luck! . . .

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ABINA. Sure now I think of it! Your ferns and feathers. All the rubbish that was in your room.

JAMES. (with a chuckle) To me so precious! And my case of eggs. Once you knocked it down.

ABINA. (almost defending herself) Well, lookit, James, I couldn't help it. I had to clean your room!

JAMES. Another time 'twas a jar of tadpoles that you toppled over from my window-sill.

ABINA. On purpose, you said, if you please!

JAMES. Oh, admit it now.

ABINA. Well, maybe, maybe. Is it any wonder I was that provoked! With mice and mosses, leaves and bones—I never knew what next! . . . (reaching for her knitting) Still and all, outside of that, I used to stand by you then.

JAMES. (looking down; low) You did and after—in all that followed . . .

ABINA. (knitting) That was a bad time.

JAMES. 'Twas hell, Abina,

ABINA. True for you. Will you ever forget the day . . . (laying down her knitting) when mother—ah, with her poor mind gone!—was taken away from us! And father—broken! I see him still—staring after the closed cab. From that time onward he went to bits, started to drink hard.—And yet in one way he and I were shaken less than you. We were up to the coming horror. All that summer we'd seen the signs. But you, how could you! With no concern but spying out mushrooms in the dawn of day!

JAMES. Eyes and no eyes . . .

ABINA. Ah, poor lad, that was the end of that! . . . (with a ring of praise) But how you stiffened! All at once you set yourself to work. And proved your mettle—aye, indeed—for at seventeen you were in a job!

JAMES. One thing happened at that time, Abina, and that was Mary Flynn. Looking back, 'tis all confusion, but I see her through it . . . her calm eyes . . .

ABINA. (with a regret that is slightly perfunctory) Ah, you and Mary! . . .

JAMES. It couldn't prosper. I was wretched—and I scared her off.

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ABINA. Wisha, then, she was scared easy! I wouldn't think much of *that*.

JAMES. (smiling at her) You see, Abina, the time had come to stand by me again.

ABINA. (pleased) Oh, go on. 'Twas you that—

JAMES. Well, we helped each other so.

ABINA. God was good, *He* helped us, James. Look how our sky cleared! (James looks at her in mild surprise) You got that job with Mr. Morris. And he was exactly the right man. So decent—different to all the others. He gave you a feeling for your work

JAMES. (almost to himself) And nothing happened

ABINA. No, indeed. Never once were you in a scrape.

JAMES. (rising, his hands knotted; as if with the echo of an old distress) But things should happen! I don't know how. A man should have a *time*! In the office men of my age often spoke about *their* time. Mind you, the talk was of great interest . . . (his eyes veiled) the games, the gadgets, the old Ford cars. But here's the strange thing—'twas news to me as to the younger men. But they were happy, they were *in* their time. And I . . . was just spewed out. (walks right; simply) Too well they knew it! I'd see them sometimes eyeing me sideways—a queer look.—Little wonder, with the children—(turning and facing her) with Phil and Peggy it was just the same

ABINA. Oh, don't talk to me of the children!

JAMES. Why not, Abina? They were on my side

ABINA. (staring at him) On your side! After all that happened!

JAMES. (looking down) You mean—after to-day? (a chuckle)

ABINA. (pouncing) Don't you blame them?

JAMES. Blame them! Oh!

ABINA. And they after flinging free!

JAMES. (low) They were angels—for they led me out—out into the day

ABINA. But there they left you!

JAMES.—Left me to it! That's just it, you see! (going

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slowly towards window) I should have known, for the same thing happened how many years before. Other angels, a girl, a boy, whose names are gone from me, were in it then.—This was before the mice and mosses, the things you hated, the untidy flowers.—Was I the youngest? Maybe so. Anyway we three formed a compact to go together to Castlecarney on a certain day . . . A week I waited. Spent all my pennies on liquorice and pies—with something special for the little girl. All for the great day! And when it came, I saw it in—you may be sure of that! 'Twas perfect weather! At nine o'clock—off away with me like a bird! We were to meet . . . would you guess where?

ABINA. (who has been watching him closely) The same place as to-day?

JAMES. (nodding and smiling) At Blaney's Cross . . . 'Twas gone like smoke . . . till early-on to-day, as I was waiting, it all came back, how that time also—ah!—I waited, waited with a sinking heart, those other youngsters who never came. A double happening! (with half a chuckle) It beguiled my mind. If that was the idea, why not go on—go on and finish it—do it all as it was then? But what came after? To Castlecarney? Was it there I went? All the way I was trying to think what came out of that same day. And when I got there, reached the meadows a bit below the wood, my head was moidered—I was crossed by questions: where and what and how.—But, ah, the calm, the calm of that place made me give them up! I settled down beneath a trée 'twixt wood and meadow, and I fell asleep.—And when I woke I had the answer—dancing, dancing before my eyes! A gust I saw, with grasses waving, scattering skyways bees and smells of honey-clover. Ah! Branches, sunbeams, little birds all in a great stir. Winking limeflowers falling down like favours thrown at me! . . . God, I'd wakened that time too—under the same tree! I was looking—staring out—seeing again with my old eyes! Or with my young eyes that was it! And when I listened I could hear . . . the wood. Not loud, but full—but full of secrets. Near and far away.—A world wild—and I, O, Lord!—I so near it—on the very verge!—Oh, if only! Just to make it! I did before. And I will too! I'll—(pulled up) Abina, what's the matter! . . .

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ABINA. (looking old and shrunken) Nothing. Nothing. But the way you spoke . . .

JAMES. (coming near her; with a quick, sweet solicitousness) Why, what of it? Where's the worry? . . .

ABINA.—(echoing as she looks at him) Where's the worry? (She smiles slowly with dim reassurance) I declare you're right . . .

(A slight pause, and then, shortly, shyly they grasp hands)

JAMES. . . . There's only one thing: Eyes And No Eyes. Oh, where is it? I must find that book. (walking right) I'll go and see if it's in the attic.

ABINA. Can I help you?

JAMES. Not at all.

(*Abina* rises to draw the curtains. *James* stands at the door; his finger remains poised on the electric switch for some seconds before he turns on the overhead light, simultaneously he swings round)

JAMES. The devil take me, but I *had* my time!—And 'tisn't over! It goes on and on! . . .

ABINA. (drawing the curtains) Look at that now.

JAMES. On and on. (*Abina* turns. He smiles at her, and his voice breaks) *My* time, Abina! . . .

ABINA. (smiling back and shaking her head) Wisha, James . . .

CURTAIN

JOHN BOYD



Forrest Reid: An Introduction To His Work

FORREST REID was born in Belfast on 24th June, 1876, and he died in Warrenpoint on 4th January, 1947. His funeral was private; there were few mourners—and somehow it was appropriate. He would not have wished it otherwise, for he hated any display or pomp. His passing was like his life, modest and unpretentious, and the people of Belfast remained unaware that a writer of international renown, who had lived all his life in their city, had died.

But abroad his death did not go entirely unnoticed: E. M. Forster paid a fine tribute in "The Listener" and said bluntly that Reid was the most important man in Belfast; John Sparrow gave a talk on the BBC Third Programme in which he compared Reid's achievement to that of Dickens in "David Copperfield" and Proust in "Du Côté de Chez Swann"; and various other tributes appeared. This essay is not another tribute but a brief analysis of his achievement. And I do not want to talk about the personality of the man, though I had the privilege of his friendship during the last years of his life; I want to confine myself to his books.

As a writer Forrest Reid developed late. His first novel "The Kingdom of Twilight" (1904) was, he admitted, a false start; and immediately he read it on publication he wanted to have it suppressed. In his own words "it was a hotch-potch of purple patches, childish gush, and childish sentimentality." Two years later he published "The Garden God," a Pateresque 'nouvelle' about a youthful friendship, which pleased Edmund Gosse, but which displeased Henry James, a novelist whom Reid regarded as one of his masters.

These first two books are obviously apprentice work: Reid was to find himself in his next two books: "The Bracknels" (1911), a realistic chronicle of a Belfast middle-class family, and "Following Darkness" (1912), a novel of adolescence, and one of his greatest achievements.

The subject of "The Bracknels" is the struggle for the soul of a spirit-haunted boy born into a philistine family; and the

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relationship of Denis Bracknel to his family is not unlike that of the youthful Shelley to his; but Shelley conquered his fears, while Denis Brackel is conquered by them. Reid later thought that the texture of this book was uneven, and spent the last year of his life revising it. (The revised version has been recently published). He was, however, confident that he had succeeded with the descriptive atmosphere: "As for the background—the lovely Lagan valley, the river itself, the house, the woods—all these, I think, *must* be there, *must* come through; for they had been my world from childhood, and were the kind of thing I found easiest to do."

"Following Darkness" is the only other novel Reid revised. It was published under the title of "Peter Waring" in 1937, and a study of the two texts is interesting not only to the student of Reid's work, but to the student of English prose style. For throughout his life Reid was intensely interested in style; indeed, he was so sensitive to other writers that he had to refrain from reading stylists like Henry James lest his own work should become infected. Finally, however, he forged for himself such a delicate instrument that he achieved recognition as one of the outstanding stylists in modern prose. I say 'forged,' for he took great pains with his writing, and found his medium only after a long process of trial and error. In his early work there are to be found more than traces of Pater and James; but in his mature work the style, seemingly effortless and beautifully simple, is completely his own. As a stylist he certainly ranks with Goldsmith in the eighteenth century, and E. M. Forster in our own day; and like them in English, and Antole France in French, he makes the art of prose narrative seem child's play.

Indeed Reid's whole art is, in a special sense, child's play; I mean that he was absorbed, above all, in the play of imagination in the child; for all his art is, in fact, a striving to recapture the vision of childhood. And he succeeded in focussing his vision only after he had realised that to do so he must limit himself, must become more poet than novelist, and be content to follow his own instinct. So though "Peter Waring" is outwardly a realistic novel of adolescence, it is also a non-realistic vision of childhood and youth.

"The spirit of youth is not merely bright and vivacious; above all, it is not merely thoughtless and noisy. It is melancholy, dreamy, passionate; it is admirable, and it is base; it is full of curiosity; it is healthy, and it is morbid; it is animal, and it is spiritual; sensual, yet filled with vague half-realized yearnings after an ideal—that is to say, it is the spirit of life itself . . ."

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Youth as the spirit of life itself—that is the kernel of his philosophy. He believed that the child is father to the man; that our early years are the most significant; and that a person who loses the vision of childhood is somehow maimed.

It is not surprising, therefore, that for many aspects of modern life Reid had nothing but disdain. He despised politicians and the wars they seemed unable to avoid; he despised the ostentation of the rich and the vulgarity of the poor. So his world was a very limited one: he excluded from it what he considered irrelevant to his purposes. He was, therefore, a very subjective writer, and in the depth of his subjectivity lay the source of his strength.

But it was a long time before Reid realised what kind of a novelist he was; and after "Following Darkness" he wrote "The Gentle Lover" (1913), a 'European' novel reminiscent of Henry James, which was followed by "At the Door of the Gate" (1915), an objective, rather melodramatic novel whose chief character is an unhappily married young man. In these books he was writing completely outside his own experience, and they must be regarded as failures.

He was more successful, however, with his next two novels, because in them he returns to the world of childhood. "The Spring Song" (1916) has a young hero, Grif Weston; and "Pirates of the Spring" (1919) is a school story, though it is very far indeed from being a conventional school story. "Pirates of the Spring" is, to my mind, the better novel—the characterisation more authentic, the action more convincing, for I find the closing chapters of "The Spring Song" overpitched in tone, and the story rather thin.

In 1922 Reid made a last attempt to write a conventional novel. "Pender Among the Residents," a social comedy with a happy ending, is an amalgam of a village chronicle, ironically treated; a rather conventional ghost story; and a not particularly convincing love story between an introverted ex-serviceman Pender, and an extroverted local beauty, Norah Burton. Reid confessed that it did not spring from a deep impulse, and it may be regarded as a manufactured book, without personal significance to its author. But after he had written it he finally realized where his strength lay. Henceforth he was to write exactly as he pleased. The public had ignored his work: in future he wrote only to please himself. And so the last twenty years of his life saw his flowering as a creative artist.

In 1927 he published "Demophon," a picaresque Greek tale of a boy's adventures. Written in a beautifully limpid prose, "Demophon" is not only an imaginative adventure told for its own sake but a tale with symbolic overtones for its author, a

symbolism which is apparent to readers of "Apostate," Reid's autobiography, published during the previous year.

"Apostate" is undoubtedly a masterpiece, and certainly one of the finest autobiographies in our language. It is, indeed, the key both to the writer and the man, and the opening chapter reveals the nature of his work more clearly than any criticism.

"The primary impulse of the artist springs, I fancy, from discontent, and his art is a kind of crying for Elysium. In this single respect, perhaps, there is no difference between good and bad art. For in the most clumsy and bungled work (if it has been born of the desire for beauty) we should doubtless find, could we but pierce through the dead husk of it to the hidden conception, that same divine homesickness, that same longing for an Eden from which each one of us is exiled. Strangely different these paradisian visions. For me it may be the Islands of the Blest 'not shaken by winds nor ever wet with rain . . . where the clear air spreads without a cloud,' for you the jewelled splendour of the New Jerusalem. Only in no case, I think, is it our own free creation. It is a country whose image was stamped upon our soul before we opened our eyes on earth, and all our life is little more than a trying to get back there, our art than a mapping of its mountains and streams."

I am speaking, of course, of a particular kind of art, for I know there are artists whose work bears witness to a complete acquiescence in the world and in life as it is. 'Fuir! là-bas fuir!'—It would be difficult to discover an echo of such a cry in any line written by Thackeray or Jane Austen. Take it, then, as a point of view suggested because it helps to explain my own writings, because the general impression remaining with me of the origin of these experiments and strivings is that they were for the most part prompted by just such a feeling of exile—exile from a world of which I did have a later glimpse from rare time to time. No matter how objective, how impersonal I tried to be, this subconscious lyrical emotion before long crept in, perhaps merely in a descriptive passage, in the dwelling upon this or that aspect or mood of nature, which had somehow opened a door into my secret world . . . "

What Forrest Reid was as a boy he remained throughout his life; he never became really interested in adult affairs with the exception, of course, of his interest in the arts—painting and music as well as literature. When later his characters grew up he lost interest in them and his inspiration seemed cut off. He was, of course aware of this abnormality, and in "Private Road" (the continuation of "Apostate") published in 1940, he suggests that he suffered from a "mysterious form of arrested development." And during his last years he often wondered wherein lay the

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roots of his psychological growth or rather lack of growth. And though he had no time for the findings of Freud, he was deeply interested in the theories of a psychoanalyst who told him that the source of his writing lay deep in his early childhood, and was connected with his love for his nurse Emma. Emma, who left the Reid family before Forrest was six years old, is one of the chief characters in "Apostate," and reappears in "Demophon" under the guise of Demeter.

In 1934 he published "Brian Westby," a delicate and poignant novel of the relationship of a father and son. Linton, the father, is a writer separated from his wife: the boy Brian is his son. They meet as a result of a chance encounter and become friends. Once the coincidence of their meeting is accepted, the novel is completely satisfying.

The three final novels Reid wrote are in reality one: being centred in the childhood of Tom Barber, their central character. "Uncle Stephen" (1931), "The Retreat" (1936), and "Young Tom" (1944) are, in the judgment of critics such as Edwin Muir, 'one of the most original and most perfect works of imagination of our time.' Reid loved writing these books, and confesses in "Private Road" that Tom Barber grew to be extraordinarily real to him, in a way none of his other characters had ever been. And when he had completed this trilogy he felt that his work was accomplished, that he had done at last what he had always wanted to do—written a novel completely out of the stream of contemporary fiction. Yet, curiously enough, his exploration into child consciousness and dream life allied him to such novelists as Proust, Virginia Woolf, Kafka and Joyce; and like these novelists he had to evolve for himself a prose style essentially 'poetic.' For Reid, though he wrote verse very rarely, came to consider himself as a poet who chose prose as his medium. And, like a poet, he believed in reading his work aloud. If it sounded right to his ear, then probably it *was* right: that was how he judged his prose.

In this essay I have had no space to discuss his other books, though they are important. But in 1915 he wrote the first critical work on W. E. Yeats, a book which still remains the most detailed and discerning study of our greatest poet. And in 1929 he wrote a fine book on Walter de la Mare, one of his life-long friends. Then, too, his critical essays and short stories were collected and published under the title of "Retrospective Adventures" in 1941.

All his criticism is remarkable for its independence and its sensitiveness. He was, like his master Anatole France, an extremely personal critic, who believed that 'il n'y a pas plus de

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critique objective qu'il n'y a d'art objective,' and 'tous ceux qui se flattent de mettre autre chose qu'eux-mêmes dans leur oeuvre sont dupes de la plus fallacieuse illusion.' His criticism is therefore an exploration by one creative mind into that of another with whom he feels a certain kinship—he never wrote of writers with whom he was out of sympathy. Wisely he always kept within his range. So E. M. Forster noted that Reid's study of Yeats is creative because 'it derives from the same experience (the supernatural spiritual experience of the novels) but it is more conscious: the writer not only feels but understands, and so can understand another writer and can produce one of the subtlest and profoundest studies of our day.'

Finally, Reid was a scholar—his "Illustrators of the Sixties" is a standard work; and he spent forty years, on and off, making translations for his own pleasure from the Greek Anthology: his "Poems from the Greek" appeared in 1943.

Such books as these, however, are but offshoots of his genius: primarily he must be considered a novelist. It is by his novels and his autobiographies that he will survive; and there is no doubt that his work can be judged by the highest standards and found not wanting. The Tom Barber trilogy bears comparison with Anatole France's "Le Livre de Mon Ami," "Pierre Nozière," and "Le Petit Pierre"; "Peter Waring" is a study in adolescence as moving as André Gide's "La Porte Etroite"; "Apostate" compares with Aksakoff's "Years of Childhood." But such comparisons are rough and ready, and in reality misleading. Forrest Reid was a unique artist, and his death deprives Ireland of an outstanding man of letters. His books are now being translated into various languages, and discriminating students of literature everywhere are beginning to realize his importance. But in Belfast he is still unhonoured: the city in which he lived throughout the 70 years of his life still remains unaware of what kind of man it has lost.



ROBERT GREACEN



The Case of Charles James Lever

(1)

THE case of Charles James Lever may be considered in terms of his class, the Anglo-Irish. Centuries earlier, the Norman settlers had become absorbed and integrated into the native Irishry, becoming in fact "more Irish than the Irish themselves." The Anglo-Irish, like the English-Scots settlers of Ulster, remained substantially separate from the "native" Irish, differing in class-status and religion.

Yet, despite all attempts to preserve their privilege and maintain an insulated existence, the Irish climate did have its effect on "the English in Ireland." Many of them adopted those characteristics of recklessness and independence that are, fairly or otherwise, considered the birthright of the Irishman, Absurd generosity, spending without stint, gambling and carousing away a patrimony, letting business affairs drift—these are the attributes that so many of the characters of Anglo-Irish novelists have had in full measure. The Castles Rackrent and Squander are the typical seats of the eighteenth and nineteenth century gentry in fiction.

The turn of the century brought the Act of Union. Grattan's Parliament had, in a sense, made Ireland a nation, admittedly a Protestant and minority nation; it had given dignity and meaning to the Anglo-Irish, no longer mere "colonials." When that Parliament was bribed into acquiescence, Dublin, formerly the centre of gravity, went into decline, no longer the second city of a great Empire; she was now a provincial capital, however charming her Georgian facades. The landlords preferred to live in London and to leave in charge of their abandoned estates agents whose corruption and cruel exactments on the tenantry need no recital. After a visit of George IV to Dublin, a couple of decades after the Union, this jingling mock-lament was written on his departure:

*You praised each city street and square:
It's a pity people don't live there.
Oh wirrasthrue! oh wirrasthrue!*

*But quality lived there one day,
Before the time of Castlereagh;
Like you and him they're gone away.
Oh wirrasthrue! oh wirrasthrue!*

James Lever, father of the novelist, had come to Dublin from Lancashire as a young man and, by 1800 was becoming prosperous as a builder. His patron, the influential John Claudius Beresford, Commissioner of Revenue, had helped him get the contract for substantial alterations to the Custom House. He built the new Roman Catholic College at Maynooth, as well as churches and barracks, and was given the job of remodelling Grattan's Parliament to house the Bank of Ireland. At this time Charles James Lever was a small boy four years old, going to school for the first time to a Mr. Ford. These classes were broken up when the father of an ill-treated boy gave the schoolmaster a sound flogging with his own birch. Young Lever, removed to another school, soon showed signs of literary precociousness by reading out newspaper items to his parents, sometimes mischievously concocting alarming events and giving them the appearance of actuality by the inclusion of carefully thought-out details. He had become a storyteller!

Lever's father, though directly English, soon fitted into the society of Protestant Dublin. He was talkative, merry, fond of company, the keeper of a good table. At his house, tales circulated as freely as the port and claret, concerning the wits, orators and curious members of the old Parliament, the clubs they frequented, their duelling and hard-drinking. A high-spirited boy, with a liking for military dash, young Lever easily absorbed the material out of which he was to fashion Charles O'Malley and Harry Lorrequer.

Later on, Lever was to claim as uncle Sir Ashton Lever—it is thought that in reality this gentleman was a rather remote cousin—of Alkrington Hall near Manchester. Sir Ashton collected fossils, shells, weapons, native costumes and stuffed birds to such an extent that his mansion eventually was unable to house the total collection. The "Holophusikon," as he called this private museum, exhausted his patrimony and gave him a wide reputation as an eccentric. When the British Museum refused to buy the collection, Sir Ashton disposed of it in 1788 by lottery; he sold 8,000 guinea tickets out of 36,000. His death soon afterwards led many to suspect suicide. There is a basis for a Charles Lever story in that "uncle" whose reckless mania for acquisition brought ruin in its end.

(II)

The nineteenth century in Ireland was dismal, drab, in ways horrible, contrasting with the eighteenth when at least the

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Irish Ascendancy was vigorous and spirited. A figure like Sheridan could not have reached his full stature in the nineteenth, for the *beau monde* had surrendered love of brilliance and good taste to a bourgeois greed of power and accumulation. England under Victoria was dull enough, whatever excitements were provided by an Empire still in the expansionist stage; but Ireland, due to absenteeism, rack-renting, famine and subsequent emigration, became distressed to the point of dereliction.

The horrors of the Famine years are too well-known to require mention here. Neglect, sectarian strife and poverty decimated what had once been a proud Gaelic people; and the results, only a century later, are not difficult to find. Over the century of Victorian "progress" and "expansion" there lies a thick pall. Indeed, the English working class, with child-labour and city overcrowding and the fast growth of urban slumland, was little more fortunate than the Irish peasantry to whom death had become a frequent and even welcome visitor.

That is the dark side of the picture. There is another side where one glimpses the laughter-loving and rollicking attitude. Literature, since it is a reflection and an interpretation of life at a given place and period, drew on the jollity and delight equally as on the bitterness and frustration.

Maria Edgeworth did not, in such works as *Castle Rackrent*, dig deep into the nature of her fellow-countrymen; but she wrote of them out of real knowledge and affection, despite an improving and moralising father at her elbow. Samuel Lover and Charles Lever were not of the "county" as the Edgeworths, but sons of prosperous Dublin merchants with an *entrée* to the society of the gentry and nobility. The 'Pale' was still a living force, with its cultural nerve-centre in Trinity College and its political headquarters in Dublin Castle. No matter how tenderly Lover and Lever might write of the "native" Irish and with what understanding and first-hand knowledge, nothing could bridge the gap—fixed at birth—between the two nations.

William Carleton of the Monaghan-Tyrone peasantry is perhaps the strongest contrast possible to Charles Lever, gentleman and novelist. Carleton came of native stock for whom Irish was the language most readily at hand; but Carleton, wishing to be considered a scholar and a gentleman, regarded English as the *essential*, culturally superior language. In the stories and novels of Carleton one finds the authentic voice of Gaelic Ireland, for all his early tilts at the Roman Catholic clergy; he was of the soil and, however he tried, could not rid himself of the earthy quality which has preserved his reputation. Among the great names which supported his successful application for a Civil List pension in 1847 was Maria

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Edgeworth, who wrote to him privately expressing admiration for:—

“ . . . works which give with such masterly strokes and in such strong and vivid colour the pictures of our country's manners, her virtues and her vices, without ministering to party prejudice or exciting dangerous passions.”

Only a short time earlier Carleton had written *Valentine McClutchy*, in which he denounced the evils of the landlord system; but the Edgeworths, one must remember, were model landlords and Maria's father was the author of many schemes for the betterment of the tenantry.

Thus we can see Carleton, in a sense, as the spokesman of oppressed Ireland, despite the low opinion in which he was held by some co-religionists; while, on the other hand, Lever was a typical representative of the Protestant interest, far more typical than prudent Maria Edgeworth could possibly be, in his extravagance and lavish generosity. Carleton, too, addressed himself primarily to an Irish public, while Lever wrote with an eye on English and Scots readers (and much of his work was read on the Continent) of the amiable antics of Paddy the Irishman. Carleton's redundant style is that of a clever peasant, hedge-schooled; Lever's is that of the Trinity graduate, who had actually lived among Red Indians in North America, as with German students at Gottingen, a man familiar with the usages of the polite world. It is not surprising that Carleton eventually attacked Lever, rather unjustly, in *The Nation*, as a buffoon who was growing rich from the parody of his fellow-countrymen.

(III)

Turning to Charles Lever's actual work one becomes more and more aware of the conflict in his nature: the desire for quick success fought the impulse of the artist. At the time he was working as a dispensary doctor, during a cholera epidemic in the early eighteen-thirties, first in the West of Ireland, and later in the Portrush-Derry area, he turned his serious attention to writing as a career. Married against his father's wishes and, as always, desperately in need of hard cash, he found that he could be well paid for humorous sketches, thrown off lightly. Before long, having removed with his young family, to establish a practice among the English residents in Brussels, he started to write *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* in instalments for the *Dublin University Magazine*. These really constituted a chronicle of drolleries, wild escapades, practical jokes, exciting duels, tales of devil-may-care young men, to use his own phrase “a notebook of absurd and laughable incidents.”

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Harry Lorrequer was an unqualified success and instantly increased the circulation of the *Dublin University Magazine*. Lever, in spite of a certain diffidence (surprising in a man of his ebullient temperament) was now beginning to realise that he was an author and that authorship could be profitable. His outlook at this early stage was frankly commercial; there appears no Edgeworthian trace of wishing to "improve" his readers, no fastidious concern with style. He was content with making the reader laugh. Writing from Brussels more particularly of his increasing literary work, but where his practice also flourished under the patronage of the British Minister, he said:—

"I have only my late evenings unoccupied. I find it sufficiently wearisome and fatiguing, but I am resolved to leave no shaft unworked that promises ore."

Characteristically, he also mentioned that a projected trip to Ireland, principally to attend to the business of marketing his writing, was:—

"... very contingent upon the people who won't be sick at present, but are keeping it all for July and August."

Lever's next effort, eventually brought out in three volumes, was *Charles O'Malley*, which really consolidated his reputation and which was not to be surpassed by any of his subsequent works. Edgar Allan Poe has written an interesting essay on *Charles O'Malley*, a classic of destructive abuse. Unfortunately Poe's savagery—although it contains some undeniable flashes of insight—is hopelessly onesided, as when he says:—

"But why speak of vulgarisms of language? There is a disgusting vulgarity of thought which pervades and contaminates this whole production, and from which a delicate or lofty mind will shrink as if from a pestilence. Not the least repulsive manifestation of this leprosy is to be found in the author's blind and grovelling worship of mere rank. Of the Prince Regent, that filthy compound of all that is bestial—that lazarette of all moral corruption—he scruples not to speak in terms of grossest adulation.... The American, at least, who shall peruse the concluding pages of the book now under review, and not turn from the base sycophancy which infects them, is unworthy of his country and his name."

This cannonade of overstatement explodes wide of the mark. These two early novels no doubt disappoint the humourless who go to them in search of the "art of the novel"; and that Lever idolised wealth and position is sheer nonsense, as can be seen from the continual fun he pokes at the aristocracy and the landed gentry, both in his fiction and in his private correspondence.

ROBERT GREACEN

Tiring of medicine, in 1842 Lever returned to Ireland as editor of the *Dublin University Magazine* at the invitation of the publisher M'Glashan. Long afterwards he declared, in reference to his third novel, *Jack Hinton*:—

“ Some disparaging remarks on Ireland and Irishmen in the London press, not very unfrequent at the time, nor altogether obsolete now, had provoked me at the moment.”

Yet in his first editorial, in which he showed a firm allegiance to the English Tories, there occurred such definite phrases as “the assertion of our (ie. *Tory*) political cause”; and he described the magazine as being “for nearly ten years the steady defender of Protestantism of these realms.” Here a two-way pull comes into prominence. Lever, Conservative, Protestant and a gentleman, could never be of the ordinary Irish, however much he sympathised with moderates who wished to see Ireland more justly treated; and the same James Lever, unreliable Irishman and extravagant wanderer, never felt at home when visiting London. The important English writers, he remarked, with a faint suggestion of unfulfilled hopes:—

“ . . . are quite ready to give me an occasional whiff of the incense whenever they find they have too much smoke on their own altars.”

Back in Dublin, he created a circle of brilliant men around him, an extension on intellectual lines of that *burschenschaft* he had formed as a Trinity College undergraduate. Isaac Butt and Griffin, the latter a future Bishop of Limerick, were among the intimates who gathered at Templeogue House for good eating and drinking—and good talking. Lever lived at the rate of £3,000 a year, it was estimated, and he had to earn almost the entire amount from editorial and creative work. Thackeray as a young man came to Dublin and, having duly sat at Lever's feet, dedicated his *Irish Sketch Book* to him, gracing it with several allusions of the utmost cordiality.

This dedication gave further ammunition to the nationalist anti-Lever group, who felt that still further injury had been done their cause; and when Thackeray's book received favourable notice in the *University Magazine*, the attacks were pressed home with even more vigour. Lever was also shortly to be involved in a quarrel with Samuel Carter Hall—the original of Dickens' “Mr. Pecksniff”—over an unfavourable review in the magazine, but which Lever himself had not written. Hall accused Lever of “slander[ing] his (i.e. Lever's) native country

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and its people" and of "disregard of courtesy and arrogance unparalleled" and found himself promptly challenged to a duel. The duel was never fought for Lever withdrew the charge that Hall had been bribed to express certain Liberal views; the arbitrator in the dispute, Lord Ranelagh, remarked pointedly "I suppose this is the first time four Irishmen met to shoot an Englishman and didn't do it."

Difficulty with regard to contributors, slander and abuse from the Repealers, the somewhat cramped life of Dublin after having lived abroad, ever-recurring monetary troubles and ill-health forced Lever back to the Continent in 1845. The Levers now spent several years in Italy; one of the books he undertook there was *Roland Cashel* in which he aimed at a mixture of social satire and melodrama; he gleefully satirised some of his Dublin enemies, as well as taking revenge on his former admirer Thackeray, who had parodied his style in *Punch*. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to her friend Miss Mitford (one of his great enthusiasts) in praise of Lever's "cordial, vivacious manner" and pronounced him "a gentleman past mistake."

But during those years in Italy Lever was in search of political reward, preferably in the shape of a diplomatic sinecure, for his expenditure was unabated. Charged with extravagance, he retorted that only by large-scale entertaining and constant travel could he find necessary 'copy' for the fiction on which he now wholly depended for a living. How far this was a rationalisation of a spendthrift nature one can form a shrewd opinion. Eventually his hopes matured and he was appointed British consul at Spezzia, in 1857, a post which involved practically no duties, so leaving him completely free for his literary work. After much disappointment in seeking preferment, at last, in 1867, he was given the consulship of Trieste by Lord Derby, with the remark:—

"Here is six hundred a year for doing nothing and you are just the man to do it."

In fact, this Trieste post did involve residence and a certain amount of work. Also, Trieste was not Florence and Lever found the society of the Adriatic uncongenial.

Many years of residence on the Continent, although he did occasionally visit London and Ireland, where he was received in honour by men of the highest rank, cut Lever off from the main source of his inspiration. Yet he wrote novel after novel,

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to be serialised in Dickens' periodicals and, later on, in *Blackwood's Magazine*. The Irishman abroad—and his adventures—was a typical theme exploited with unwearied zest; one of his best efforts is perhaps *The Dodd Family Abroad*, written as a series of letters home from an Irish family—father, mother, two daughters and a son. The situations in *The Dodd Family* are less extravagant than usual, but none the less fantastically comic; and here and there one comes across acute comments on the manners of English and Irish people travelling for pleasure in Europe and finding misadventure instead. The Dodds were not a success with the public, which preferred a conventionally-told story. Some critics maintained that Lever exaggerated. He himself was indignant with this particular criticism for he felt that the Dodds were among his finest creations; and he complained that, far from overstating, he lacked "the courage to tell the things that have come under my notice . . . My great effort is to tone down the picture." This is an example of what Kenny Dodd wrote to a friend from the Hotel de Bellevue, Brussels:—

"To train a man for the Continent, you must begin early; teach him French when a child; let him learn dominoes at four, and to smoke cigars at six; wear lacquered boots at eight, and put his hair in paper at nine; eat sugar-plums for dinner, and barley-water for tea; make him a steady shot with the pistol, and a cool hand with the rapier; and there he is finished and fit for the Boulevard—a nice man for the salons."

Now it must be confessed that, at best, Lever is a novelist of the second rank; his general level fell far below that of his friends Dickens and Thackeray. His chief faults were facility, unwillingness to impose pattern on his material and lack of serious purpose. He had the gift for social satire highly developed and he might—had he taken pains—have left at least one indisputable classic. The great success of his two early novels was to weigh him down throughout his literary career; try as he did, he could not escape Harry Lorrequer and Charles O'Malley. The public decided what he must write and he lacked the strength to deny that demand. He finished his last novel, *Lord Kilgobbin*, in 1872, in Trieste, and died the same year; it was, he said in the dedication to his deceased wife, "written in breaking health and broken spirits." And he added, significantly, "I hope this effort will be my last." *Lord Kilgobbin* ended a literary career of approximately thirty-five years; and

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one can only marvel at the sustained power of invention which that career reveals.

Charles James Lever was a remarkable man. As doctor, novelist, diplomat, talker and observer of men and manners he showed an uncanny, a perhaps fatal, versatility. He remained too much "in the world" to be a fine artist; and he was too seldom alone. Of the Anglo-Irish gentry, typical of his time, did he caricature the Irish people?—or flatter them? After all, he had to bear up against both accusations.



BOOK REVIEWS

TONN TUILE by Séamus O Néill: (*Sáirséal agus Dill, Dublin; 7/6*).

Early last year Robert Greacen organized a Reading of recent verse by Irish poets. I remember on that occasion three young men read poems in Irish. It was an exciting experience, to hear for the first time living verse—that is, *contemporary* verse, written in Irish. One of these poets was Séamus O'Neill. The title of this book, FLOOD TIDE, derives from a quotation, given by the author, in Old Irish:

The flood-wave
And the two swift ebb-tides:
What the flood-wave brings to thee
The ebbing wave carries out of thy hand.

This is from the Song of the Old Woman of Beare, translated by Kuno Meyer.

Tonn Tuile is quietly written; the pictures are painted in subdued colours. I must register my protest against the vulgarisation of the fine words like *Nodlaig*, *indé* and *indiu*, by this new spelling. I wish from my heart some voice of authority would speak out against these enormities. Writers, at least, should be tender about words. Of course, in this age of hurry, it may be well to dock certain words of their silent long endings. But I cannot see that *indé* (a living word) is flattened into *inné* for any earthly reason—but that it looked too like Irish.

One is interested in the story from the start, when we are introduced to a young Irish couple, on their honeymoon, in Germany. Séamus O Néill's people are real, and the life described seems actual—in fact, too like life, one is tempted to think. The young wife is inclined to be snappy: she says unkind things to her husband all through; but then he is so consciously superior—with his eye, as he imagines, upon the ideal of culture. In reality it is respectability he is after. He is so very correct.

Tonn Tuile is extremely well written: the story never loses its hold on the reader. The interest deepens along to the end. One learns to respect and pity the man. And, as one realises her cares, the woman is excused. The author has done well to get away from heroics and the fairy-tale atmosphere. Next time,

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I would like to see him, with the ancient Chinese poet, "casting off Wisdom and rejecting Learning, and letting his thoughts wander in the Great Void."

The book is beautifully bound and printed, and it has an exciting dust jacket.

Blanaid Salkeld

THE COMMON CHORD by Frank O'Connor; (*Macmillan & Co*; 8/6).

It is of some importance to note that this book is not a collection of stories, but, as the sub-title informs us, of 'stories and tales.' That such a distinction is made at all raises an argument. The short story is as exacting a literary form as any other. But for a variety of reasons—some artistic, some economic—the short-story writer cannot be expected to limit his output only to his very best efforts; and if he is a certain type of writer he would be foolhardy to restrict himself to writing or publishing only those pieces that can be definitely characterised as stories, i.e., stories in contrast to sketches or tales. Indeed this argument has an even wider application. Graham Greene, the novelist, prefaces his recent book, *19 Stories*, with the remark that the contents are merely the by-products of a novelist's career. Whatever these by-products may be for the novelist, it is certain that the writer's imagination fairly teems with them—trivial incidents, odd characters, passing phrases and such like—and these are made into what Mr. O'Connor calls, in *The Common Chord*, tales.

The point is that unless the reader is willing to recognise this distinction and, accordingly, alter his balance when necessary, he will almost certainly lose about half the enjoyment of this book. It is not essential that he should have the unerring capacity of separating story from tale; granted the right frame of mind, then each piece in the collection will not be hindered from falling into place.

But whether story or tale, the same full-blown breath of life vivifies every page of *The Common Chord*. Mr. O'Connor is one of the most gregarious writers living, and like all great writers of this kind—Dickens, for example—he excels in three things: the presentation of problems in personal terms, the physical descriptions of people, and the portrayal and understanding of children and adolescents.

The first of these qualities is not unusual in Irish writers and, I may possibly derive from the Irishman's proverbial love of gossip. At any rate, it is the mainspring of Frank O'Connor's art and, consequently, the hub of practically every story.

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In the descriptions of people, the author has all the command of technique of a first-rate portraitist and that added hint of caricature that puffs his characters into life. In *The Custom of the Country*, Ernie Thompson, a pallid-souled, suave Romeo, is a 'tall chap with smooth, oiled oak-coloured hair and a curiously raw, beefy face that went all off into points.' His Juliet has 'a dark, plump, innocent face, all in smooth curves from the bumpy, boyish forehead to the broad, rounded chin,' and her mother has 'a sallow face that looked very innocent down the middle and full of guile round the edges like a badly-ironed pillow case.' Such pictures are frequent; indeed it is unusual for O'Connor to introduce any character without, sooner or later, sketching in a physical description.

But it is in the portrayal and understanding of children and adolescents that *The Common Chord* reaches the level of great writing. This gift has been noticeable in all phases of O'Connor's work. It is in many of his early stories: *The Flowering Leaves* is an outstanding example—in his novel, *The Saint and Mary Kate*, and in some of the stories of *The Common Chord* one of which, *The Babes in the Wood*, is a masterpiece.

This story of how an illegitimate child discovers that his 'aunt'—a sort of fairy godmother who visits him occasionally—is really his mother, has a combination of power and pathos to a degree that one finds only in a great master of the short-story—as Mr. O'Connor undoubtedly is.

D.M.

THE KING OF SPAIN'S DAUGHTER AND OTHER ONE-ACT PLAYS by Teresa Deevy (New Frontiers Press, Dublin, 2/-.)

THERE is some likelihood that future critics of Teresa Deevy's plays will regard *In Search of Valour* published here for the first time, as the true key to much of the earlier work of this remarkable dramatist. For here with deliberate exaggeration (the play is near fantasy) and with what for Miss Deevy is almost a flourish of trumpets, she announces the theme of revolt, which in one form or another is taken up by all the heroines of her earlier plays.

It is a revolt too vulnerable, too expectant, to be conditioned be mere rights. It never reaches the point at which Nora Helmer walks out at the end of *The Doll's House*. These young women dance their tarantella and leave it at that. Perhaps their attitude is Stendhalian rather than Ibsenist. At any rate, Ellie Irwin, the little maid with an "air of smouldering

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fury," is in her search for valour very much nearer to Mathilde de la Mole than to any of Ibsen's middle-class heroines. Ellie, bitterly disappointed by her glimpse of the local gentlefolk, turns in desperation to Jack the Scalp, an escaped convict of whom the district is in terror. Standing beside him as he defies the police surrounding the house, she offers to go with him—"to the end of the world." But Jack is horrified for he was "brought up respectable," and Ellie is left lamenting, "Wirra, why weren't I born in a braver time?" This gay and gusty invitation to fantasy holds within it a curiously piercing note.

The King of Spain's Daughter is one of the best known and most highly esteemed of Teresa Deevy's plays. And rightly so. For Annie Kinsella, the madcap and dreamer, who gives to everyone a different description of a local society wedding, and who in turn is pilloried by all for her "deceptions," is one of the author's most striking creations.

Strange Birth, a comparatively recent play, is about a domestic servant, Sara Meade, who regards the inmates of the house where she works as so many objects—more sympathetic certainly than brass or mahogany!—to be looked to with cheerful if detached goodwill. She, too, has her kingdom like Annie or Ellie, though at the opposite pole (Mr. Aldous Huxley would call it non-attachment), and she is involuntarily dismayed when the avowals of Billy the Postman threaten to draw her towards "this loving business . . . which might give you a fearful time." *Strange Birth*, a more fragile piece than either of the other plays, is beautifully written and shows the author in the full mastery of her powers. Although completed nearly two years ago, it still awaits stage production, a fact which should interest friends of the Abbey, official or unofficial.

The New Frontiers Press are to be congratulated for including work of such high quality in their small but impressive list of publications.

T.S.

A STORYTELLER'S CHILDHOOD by Patricia Lynch (*London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.; Dublin: Browne and Nolan, Ltd. 10/6.*)

Miss Lynch is an example of that unusual phenomenon—a writer of children's stories whose books are also read by adults. This can only mean that her work has a simple, direct humanity, a humanity which to the child is truth, to the adult, wisdom. In *A Storyteller's Childhood* she reveals enough of her early life to show us the origins of this quality and to confirm her

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in the possession of it.

As Miss Lynch tells it, the story reads like a fairy-tale (this is one written for adults which will surely be enjoyed by children, too). The house on Fair Hill in Cork is the starting point of a long quest for the 'crock of gold'—in the hands of the mysterious Mr. Blanchard, the friend of 'Tricia's father who has died far away in Egypt. But first there is the interlude on Mrs. Hennessy's farm. Through the eyes of 'Tricia we see a happy throng of people—Mrs. Hennessy herself, the Shanachie with all the stories of Ireland on the tip of her tongue, her blind husband who reads the world of sound like an open book, Francis Joseph, 'the best fiddler in the whole of Munster,' Bridie O'Callaghan, the girl who is dancing-mad and who is always saving up to go to America, the tinkers, those dark-skinned, ominous people who frighten 'Tricia but who treat her with a gruff, bantering kindness. And we have the Turf-cutter and the Turf-cutter's Donkey, in the flesh, as it were.

When the quest begins 'Tricia goes to England, into a world of reality, from which she is protected by her mother and brother. She is still the child, eager and curious, fascinated by Cockney London, and the world intrudes only spasmodically—a letter from Mr. Blanchard, a sudden move to new quarters, to a new town even. She has a spell in a London convent; she is left on a farm in Kent while her mother and brother continue the search, two pauses in the journeying of the wanderer. But she is taken up again into the hunt, across the Channel to France, and at last the quest ends.

Miss Lynch's was a happy childhood, always most difficult to write about. There is the absence of any self-pity, it is true. On the other hand there are always the dangers of condescension to one's younger self, and sentimentality. She succeeds in avoiding these two pitfalls chiefly, I think, by keeping within the terms of reference suggested by her title.

It is a storeyteller's childhood—a 'fond recollection,' no doubt, but also the unlocking of a treasury of sights, sounds, incidents and characters—both human and animal. This is the stuff which in other books Miss Lynch has transmuted into precious metal.

Artistically she has conceived the story as a whole, breaking off at the right moment, so that, temporally, it is detached from herself. She leans over the wall of years that separates her from her childhood and sees 'Tricia as a person distinct in time and surroundings. And 'Tricia is a remarkable person.

B.M.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES



JOHN BOYD: Born Belfast, 1912, and is a graduate of Queen's University and Trinity College. He has been a civil servant and a schoolmaster, and now works with the B.B.C. Edits the Northern periodical, "Lagan," and has published critical work, short stories, and poetry.

JIM EDWARDS: Born Cork, 1923. Has contributed several stories to "The Bell." Is on the staff of a Dublin monthly.

PEARSE HUTCHINSON: Born Glasgow, 1927, of Irish parents. Has lived in Dublin since he was five, and was educated at Synge Street. He worked as a book-salesman and as radio-announcer, and is now studying at U.C.D. His poems have been published in "The Bell," "Irish Times," "Irish Press," "Capuchin Annual," "Irish Bookman," etc.

BRYAN MacMAHON: Born Listowel, Co. Kerry, 1909. His stories have appeared in many anthologies and have been translated into French and German. A collection, "The Lion-Tamer and other Stories," is to be published by MacMillan. By profession he is a schoolmaster.

EOIN F. NEESON: Born Cork, 1927. Educated at Christian Brothers College, Cork, and at Newbridge College, Kildare. Served in the Defence Forces during the emergency. Has written four verse plays, one of which, "Cuchulain," was produced in Cork recently. Is now working on an epic, "Deirdre and the Sons of Usna."

P. J. MADDEN: Born Limerick, 1919. His verse has appeared in Irish and British periodicals and in the "Little Reviews Anthology." Has written a verse play "Barebones," and an acting version of Sophocles' "Antigone." Is at present Librarian at Cork County Library.

J. F. REYNOLDS: Born Dublin, 1922. Is a clerk in the Dublin Corporation. Started writing a few years ago and since then has had stories and articles published in "The Bell" and

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other Irish magazines. He also writes verse for children and has broadcast a programme of these verses from Radio Eireann.

FRANK O'CONNOR: Born Cork, 1905. Has an international reputation as a master of the short-story form. Macmillan published last year his latest book of stories, "The Common Chord."

SEAN JENNETT: Born 1912. Lives in England where he is production director of the Falcon Press and Grey Walls Press. Has had two collections of poems published by Faber and Faber. In an expert on typography.

ROBERT GREACEN: Born Londonderry, 1920. Has contributed poetry and criticism to many Irish and British periodicals and has edited various collections. Is married and lives in Dublin.

MICHAEL McLAVERTY: Has a wide reputation as a short-story writer and novelist, and his latest collection, "The Game Cock," was published last year in America. It will be published in England this year by Jonathan Cape Ltd., who are also bringing out his fourth novel, "The Three Brothers."

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